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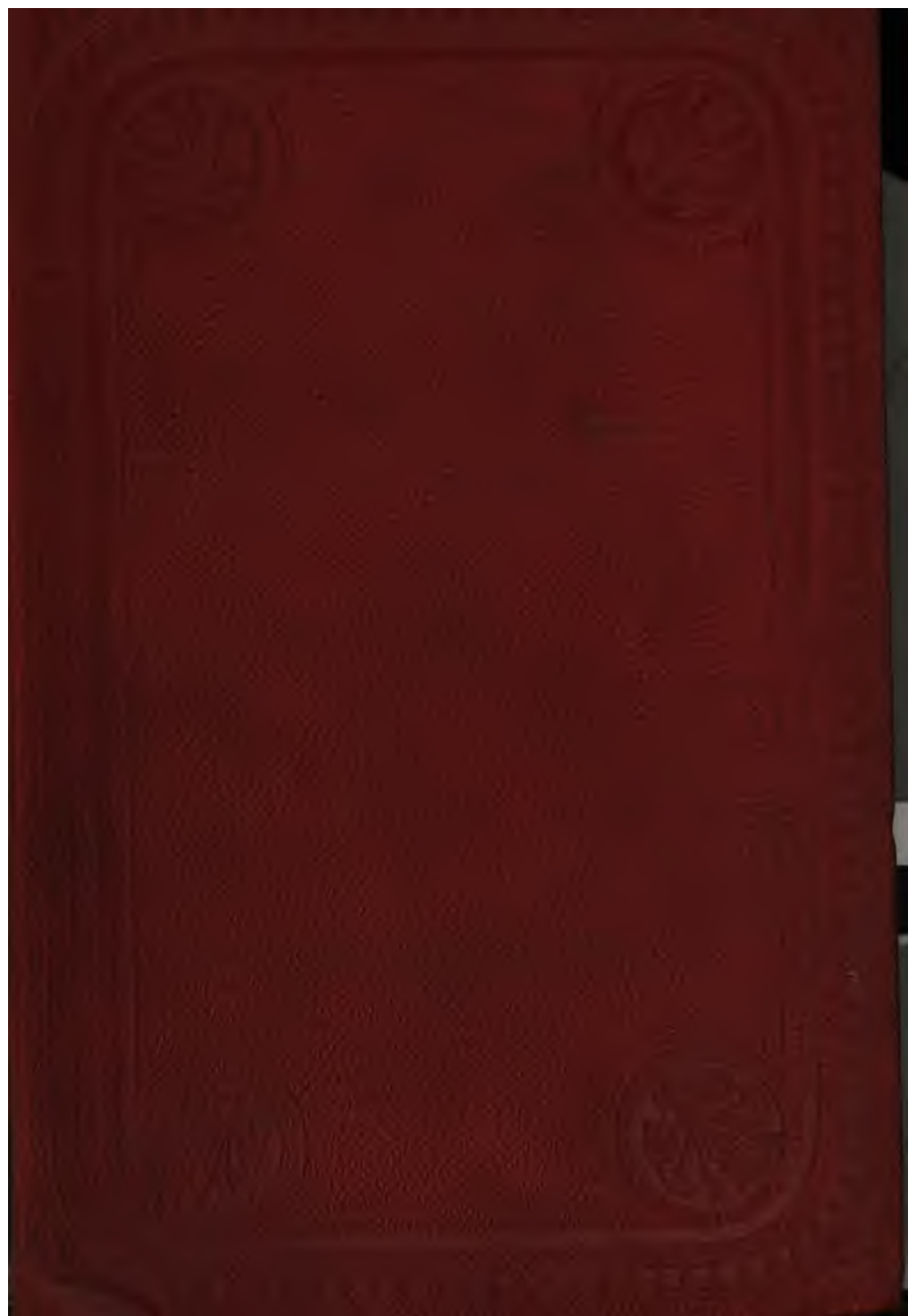
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STRONGHAND

OR

THE NOBLE REVENGE

A Tale of the Disinherited

BY GUSTAVE AIMARD

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II



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STRONGHAND.

CHAPTER I.

THE RETURN.

How was it that the tigrero, whom we saw leave the rancho almost as soon as Donna Marianna, and follow in her track, arrived so late? We will explain this in a few sentences. The young man, feeling certain that his foster-sister thoroughly knew the road she had to follow, which was, moreover, properly traced, had not dreamed of the chance of her missing her way, and not troubling himself to follow the horse's foot-marks, he pushed straight on, fancying Donna Marianna ahead of him, crossed the forest, and then entered the plain, without perceiving the person he fancied he was following.

Still, on reaching the cultivated land, he

looked carefully ahead of him, for he was surprised at the advance the young lady had gained on him in so short a time. But, though he examined the horizon all around, he saw nothing of her. Marianno was beginning to grow anxious; still, as there was a chapparal some distance ahead, whose tufted trees might conceal her whom he sought, he became reassured and pushed onward, increasing the already rapid pace of his steed. It took him some time to pass through the chapparal; when he reached its skirt, and again entered the plain, the sun had set about half-an-hour previously, and darkness was invading the earth; the darkness was, indeed, so thick, that in spite of all his exertions, he could distinguish nothing a few paces ahead of him.

The tigrero halted, dismounted, placed his ear on the ground, and listened. A moment later he heard, or fancied he heard, a distant sound resembling a horse's gallop; his alarm was at once dissipated. Convinced that the young lady was in front of him, he mounted again and pushed on. As he was only two leagues from the Hacienda del Toro, he soon reached the foot of the

rock. Here he stopped, and asked himself whether he had better go up, or regard his mission as fulfilled, and turn back. While unable to form any decision, he saw a black outline gliding along the path, and soon distinguished a horseman coming toward him.

"*Buena noche, Caballero,*" he said, when the latter crossed him.

"*Dios la de a usted buena,*" the other politely replied, and he passed on, but suddenly turned round again. The tigrero rode to meet him.

"Ah!" the horseman said, when they met, "I felt sure that I was not mistaken. How is No Marianno?"

"Very well, and at your service," the tigrero answered, recognising the major-domo; "and you, No Paredes?"

"The same, thank you; are you going up to the toro, or returning to the rancho?"

"Why that question?"

"Because in the former case I would bid you good-night, while in the latter we would ride together."

"Are you going to the rancho?"

"Yes; the Senor Marquis has sent me."

"Tell me, No Paredes, would there be any indiscretion on my part in asking you what you are going to do at the rancho at so late an hour?"

"Not the slightest, compadre. I am simply going to fetch Donna Marianna, who has remained to-day later than usual with her nurse. Her father is anxious about her long absence, and asked me to go and meet her if she were on her road home, or if not, push on to the rancho."

This revelation was a thunder-clap for the young man, who fancied that he had misunderstood.

"What!" he exclaimed, anxiously, "is not Donna Marianna at the hacienda?"

"It seems not," the majordomo answered, "since I am going to fetch her."

"Why, that is impossible!" the other continued, in extreme agitation.

"Why so?" said Paredes, beginning to grow anxious in his turn. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that Donna Marianna left the rancho full three hours ago; that I followed her without her knowledge to watch over her safety, and that she must have been

at the hacienda for more than half an hour."

"Are you quite sure of what you assert?"

"Carai! I have asserted it."

"In that case, Heaven have pity on the poor girl! for I apprehend a frightful misfortune."

"But she may have entered the hacienda without your seeing her."

"Nonsense, compadre; that is impossible. But come, we'll convince ourselves."

Without losing time in longer argument, the two men dashed up the rock at a gallop, and in a few minutes reached the first gate of the hacienda. No one had seen Donna Marianna. The alarm was instantly given; Don Hernando wished to ride off at the head of his people, and beat up the country in search of his daughter; and it was with great difficulty that he was induced to abandon the project. Don Ruiz and the majordomo, followed by some twenty peons, provided with ocote-wood torches, started in two different directions.

Marianno had an idea of his own. When he was quite certain that his foster-sister had not returned, he presumed the truth—

that she was lost in the forest. He did not consider for a moment that she had been carried off by Indian marauders, for he had not noticed any trace of a party of horsemen; and Bigote, whose nose was infallible, had evinced no anxiety during the ride. Hence Donna Marianna must be lost in the forest. The tigrero let Don Ruiz, the majordomo, and the peons pass him, and then bent his steps towards the rancho, closely followed by his dog, in spite of the exhortations of his young master and No Paredes, who wanted him to accompany them. When he was in the forest he stopped for a moment, as if to look round him; then, after most carefully examining the spot where he was, he dismounted, fastened his horse's bridle to the pommel, tied the stirrups together to keep them from clanking, and gave his horse a friendly smack on the crupper.

"Go along, Moreno," he said to it; "return to the rancho. I shall not want you again to-night."

The horse turned its fine intelligent head to its master, gave a neigh of pleasure, and started at a gallop in the direction

of the rancho. The tigrero carefully examined his gun, the priming of which he renewed, and began inspecting the ground by the light of a torch. Bigote, gravely seated on its hind legs, followed its master's every movement, and was evidently much perplexed. After a very lengthened search, the tigrero probably found what he was looking for, for he rose with an air of satisfaction, and whistled his dog, which at once ran up.

"Bigote," he said, "smell these marks; they were made by the horse of your mistress, Marianna; do you recognise them?"

The noble animal did as its master ordered, then fixed its sparkling eyes upon him with an almost human expression, and wagged its tail with delight.

"Good, Bigote! good, my famous dog!" the tigrero continued, as he patted it; "and now let us follow the trail; forward, Bigote, pick it up clean."

The dog hesitated for a moment, then it set out with its nose to the ground, closely followed by its master, who had extinguished his torch, which would henceforth be useless. But all we have narrated occu-

pied considerable time ; and the tigrero would have arrived too late to save the maiden, had not Heaven sent the hunter across her path. The dog did not once check its speed through the numberless windings of the course Negro had followed ; and master and dog together reached the spot where the horrible drama we recently described occurred.

“When I heard Stronghand’s shot,” the tigrero added, as he concluded his narrative, “I experienced a sound of deadly agony, for I understood that a frightful struggle was going on at the moment, and that the beast might conquer the man. Well, tocada, will you now believe in the jaguars?”

“Oh, silence, Marianno !” the young lady said, with a shudder ; “I almost went mad with terror when I saw the eyes of the horrible animals fixed upon me. Oh ! had it not been for this brave and honest hunter, I should have been lost.”

“Brave and honest, indeed !” the tigrero said, with frank affection ; “you are right, senorita, for Stronghand might just as fairly be called Goodheart, for he is ever so ready to assist strangers, and relieve the unfortunate.”

Donna Marianna listened with lively pleasure to this praise of the man who had saved her life; but Stronghand felt terribly embarrassed, and suffered in his heart at a deed which he thought so simple, and which he was so delighted to have done, being rated so highly.

"Come, come, Marianno," he said, in order to cut short the young man's compliments, "we cannot remain here any longer; remember that while we are quietly resting by the fireside and talking nonsense, this young lady's father and brother are suffering from deadly anxiety, and scouring the plain without any hope of finding her. We must arrange how to get away from here as soon as possible, and return to the hacienda."

"Carai, master, you are right, as usual; but what is to be done? Both you and I are on foot, and we cannot dream for a moment that the senorita could walk such a distance."

"Oh, I am strong," she said with a smile; "under your escort, my friends, I fear nothing, and can walk."

"No, senorita," the hunter said, with an accent of gentle authority, "your strength

would betray your courage; on so dark a night, and in a forest like this, a man accustomed to desert life could hardly expect to walk without falling at every step. Put yourself in our hands, for we know better than you do what is best to be done under the circumstances."

"Very good," she answered; "act as you think proper. I have suffered enough already to-day, by refusing to listen to the advice of my todayo, to prevent me being obstinate now."

"That is the way to talk," the tigrero said gaily. "What are we going to do, Stronghand?"

"While you skin the jaguars—for I suppose you do not wish to leave them as they are——"

"What!" the tigrero interrupted him, "those skins belong to you, and I have no claim to them, as you killed the beasts."

"Pooh!" the hunter said with a laugh, "I am not a tigrero, except by accident; the skins are yours, and fairly so; so you had better take them."

"Since that is the case I will not decline; but as for my part, I promised to give my

foster-sister the skins to make a rug, I will beg her to accept them."

"Very good," she answered, giving the hunter a look which filled him with joy; "they will remind me of the fearful danger I incurred, and the way in which I escaped it."

"That is settled then," the hunter said; "and I will cut down with my machete some branches to form a litter."

"Carai, that is an idea which would not have occurred to me," Marianno remarked, with a laugh; "but it is very simple. To work."

Hunters and trappers are skilful and most expeditious men; in a few minutes Marianno had skinned the jaguars, and Stronghand formed the litter; the skins, after being carefully folded, were securely fastened on the back of Bigote, who did not at all like the burden imposed on him; but after a while he made up his mind to put up with it. Stronghand covered the litter with leaves and grass, over which he laid the saddle-cloth of the horse the jaguars had devoured; then he requested the young lady to seat herself on this soft divan, which was so

suddenly improvised, and the two men, taking it on their strong shoulders, started in the direction of the hacienda, joined by Bigote, who trotted in front with glad barks.

Although the hunters had, from excess of precaution, formed torches of ocote-wood to help them, the darkness was so complete—the trees were so close together—that it was with extreme difficulty that they succeeded in advancing in this inextricable labyrinth. Forced to take continual *detours*—obliged at times to walk in water up to their waists—deafened by the discordant cries of the birds, which the flash of the torches aroused—they saw all around them the wild beasts flying, with hoarse roars and eyes glaring through the darkness. It was then that Dona Marianna fully comprehended what frightful peril she had escaped, and how certain her death would have been, had not the hunter come to her assistance with such noble self-devotion; and at the remembrance of all that had occurred, and which was now but a dream, a convulsive tremor passed over her limbs, and she felt as if she were about to faint. Stronghand, who seemed to guess

what was going on in the maiden's mind, frequently spoke to her, in order to change the current of her ideas by compelling her to answer him. They had been marching for a long distance, and the forest seemed as savage as when they started.

"Do you believe," Donna Marianna asked, "that we are on the right road?"

"Even admitting, senora, what might be possible," the hunter answered, "that Marianno and myself were capable of falling into an error, we have with us an infallible guide in Bigote, who, you may be quite certain, will not lead us astray."

"Within ten minutes, senorita," the tigrero said, "we shall enter the road that runs from the rancho to the hacienda."

All at once the two men stopped. At the same moment Donna Marianna heard shouts that seemed to answer each other in various directions.

"Forward! forward!" said Stronghand; "let us not leave your relatives and friends in anxiety longer than we can help."

"Thanks," she answered.

They continued their march; and, as the tigrero had announced, in scarce ten minutes they reached the road to the hacienda.

"What shall we do now?" Marianna asked.

"I think," Stronghand answered, "that we ought to announce our presence by a cry for help, and then proceed in the direction of those who answer us. What is your opinion, senora?"

"Yes," she said, "I think we ought to do so; for otherwise we run a risk of reaching the hacienda without meeting any of the persons sent to seek me, and who might continue their search till morning, which would be ingratitude on my part."

"You are right, nina; for all these worthy people are attached to you, and besides, your brother and Don Paredes are also seeking you."

"That is a further reason why we should hasten to announce our return," the young lady answered.

The two hunters, after consulting for a moment, uttered together that long shrill yell, which, in the desert as in the mountains, serves as the rallying cry, and may be heard for an enormous distance. Almost immediately the whole forest seemed to be aroused; similar cries broke out in all direc-

tions, and the hunters noticed red dots running with extreme rapidity between the trees, and all converging on the spot where they stood, as if they radiated from a common centre. Certain of having been heard, the hunters once again uttered their shout for help. The reply was not delayed; the galloping of horses soon became distinct, and then riders, holding torches, appeared from all parts of the forest coming at full speed, waving their hands, and resembling the fantastic huntsmen of the old German legends. In a few minutes all the persons were assembled round the litter on which the young lady reclined; and Don Ruiz and the majordomo were not long ere they arrived. We will not describe the joy of brother and sister on seeing each other again.

"Brother," Donna Marianna said to Don Ruiz, "if you find me still alive, you owe it to the man who before saved us both from the pirates of the prairies; had it not been for him, I should have been lost."

"You may safely say that, and no mistake," Marianno said, in confirmation.

"Where is he?" Don Ruiz asked—

“where is he? that I may express all my gratitude to him.”

But he was sought for in vain. During the first moment of confusion, Stronghand had summoned a peon to take his place—had glided unnoticed into the forest and disappeared—no one being able to say in what direction he had gone.

“Why this flight?” Donna Marianna murmured, with a stifled sigh; “does this strange man fear lest our gratitude should prove too warm?”

And she thoughtfully bowed her head on her bosom.

CHAPTER II.

CHANCE WORK.

ALTHOUGH he allowed nothing to be visible, Don Ruiz was vexed at heart with the affectation the hunter seemed to display in avoiding him, and escaping from his thanks. This savageness in a man to whom he owed such serious obligations appeared to him to conceal either a disguised enmity, or dark schemes whose accomplishment he feared, though he could not assign any plausible motive for them, especially after the manner in which the hunter had not hesitated on two occasions to imperil his life in assisting himself and his sister. These thoughts, which incessantly thronged to the mind of Don Ruiz, plunged him into deep trouble for some moments ; still, when the peons he had sent off to seek the hunter all returned

one after the other, declaring that they could not possibly find his trail, the young man shook his head several times, frowned, and then gave orders for the start.

Donna Marianna's return to the hacienda was a real triumphal procession. The peons, delighted at having found their mistress again safe and sound, gaily bore her on their shoulders, laughing, singing, and dancing along the road, not knowing how otherwise to express their joy, and yet desirous to make her comprehend the pleasure they felt. In spite of the fatigue that crushed her, and the state of exhaustion into which she had fallen through the terrific emotions she had undergone, Dona Marianna, sensible of these manifestations of gratitude, made energetic efforts in order to appear to share their joy, and prove to them how greatly she was affected by it. But, although she gave them her sweetest smiles and gentlest words, she could not have endured much longer the constraint, and she was really exhausted when the little party at length reached the hacienda.

The Marquis, who was suffering the most frightful agitation, had gone to the last gate

to meet them, and would possibly have gone further still, had not Don Ruiz taken the precaution, so soon as his sister was found, to send off a peon to tranquillize his mind and announce the successful result. At the first moment the Marquis completely forgot his aristocratic pride, only to think of the happiness of pressing to his heart the child he feared he had lost for ever. Don Rufino Contreras, carried away by the example, shared in the general joy, and pretended to pump up a tear of sympathy while fixing on the young lady his huge grey eyes, to which he tried in vain to give a tender expression.

The maiden threw herself with an outburst of tears into her father's arms, and at length, yielding to her feelings, fainted—an accident which, by arousing the anxiety of the spectators, cut short all the demonstrations. Donna Marianna was conveyed to her apartments, and the peons were dismissed after the majordomo had, by the orders of the Marquis, distributed among them *pesetas* and tragos of refino, which set the crown of the delight of these worthy fellows.

In spite of the offer of No Paredes, who invited him to spend the night at the hacienda, the tigrero would not consent; and after freeing Bigote from the jaguars' skins, which seemed to cause the dog considerable pleasure, they both started gaily for the rancho. It was about two o'clock, A.M., and a splendid night, and the tigrero, with his gun under his arm and his dog at his heels, was walking at a steady pace while whistling a merry jarana, when, just as he was entering the shadow of the forest, Stronghand suddenly emerged from a thicket two paces ahead of him.

"Hilloh!" the tigrero said, on recognising him; "where the deuce did you get to just now, that it was impossible to find you? What bee was buzzing in your bonnet?"

The hunter shrugged his shoulders.

"Do you fancy," he replied, "that it is so very pleasant to be stared at by those semi-idiotic peons for performing so simple a deed as mine was?"

"Well, opinions are free, compadre, 'and I will not argue with you on that score; still, *I* should not have run off in that way."

"*Quien sabe?* You are more modest than you like to show, brother; and I feel certain that, under similar circumstances, you would have acted as I did."

"That is possible, though I do not believe it; still, I thank you," he added, with a laugh, "for having discovered in me a quality which I was not aware that I possessed. But where on earth are you going at such an hour?"

"I was looking for you."

"In that case all is for the best, since you have found me; what do you want of me?"

"To ask hospitality of you for a few days."

"Our house is not large, but sufficiently so to contain a guest, especially when you are he; you can remain with us so long as you please."

"I thank you, gossip, but I shall not abuse your complaisance; I am obliged to remain for a few days in these parts, and, as the nights are fresh, I will confess that I prefer passing them under a roof instead of the star-spangled arch of heaven."

"As you please, Stronghand; the door of

my humble rancho is ever open to let you in or out. I do not want to know the reason for your stay here; but the longer you remain with us, the greater honour and pleasure will you afford us."

"Thanks, comrade."

All was settled in a few words. The two men continued their walk, and soon reached the rancho. The tigrero led the hunter to his bedroom, where they lay down side by side, and soon fell asleep. A few days elapsed, during which the hunter saw Donna Marianna several times, while careful not to let her notice him, although it was evident to Stronghand that the young lady would have liked nothing better than meeting him; perhaps she really desired it, without daring to confess it to herself.

One day, about a week after the scene with the jaguars, the hunter was lying half-asleep in a copse whose leafy branches completely hid him from sight, and quietly enjoying his siesta during the great mid-day heat, when he fancied he heard the sound of footsteps not far from the spot where he was. He instinctively opened his eyes, raised himself on his elbow, and looked

carefully around him; he checked a cry of surprise on recognising the man, who had stopped close to the thicket and dismounted, like a man who has reached the spot he desired. This man was Kidd, the bandit, with whom the reader has already formed acquaintance.

"What does that scoundrel want here?" the hunter asked himself. "He is doubtless plotting some infamy, and I bless the chance that brings him within ear-shot, for this demon is one of the men who cannot be watched too closely."

In the meanwhile Kidd had removed his horse's bit, in order to let it graze freely; he himself sat down on a rock, lit a husk cigarette, and began smoking with all the *nonchalance* of a man whose conscience is perfectly at its ease. Stronghand racked his brains in vain to try and discover the motive for the presence of the bandit in these parts, so remote from the ordinary scene of his villany, when chance, which had already favoured him, gave him the clue to the enigma, which he had almost despaired of obtaining. A sound made him turn his head, and he saw a stout horseman,

with rubicund face and handsomely dressed, coming up at an amble. When he reached the adventurer, the latter rose, bowed respectfully, and assisted him to dismount.

"Ouf!" the stout man said, with a sigh of relief, "what a confounded ride!"

"Well," the bandit replied, with a grin, "you must blame yourself, Don Rufino, for you arranged it. May the fiend twist my neck if I would damage myself, no matter for what purpose, and ride across the plain at this hour of the day."

"Everybody is the best judge of his own business, Master Kidd," Don Rufino remarked, drily, as he wiped his steaming face with a fine cambric handkerchief.

"That is possible; but if I had the honour to be Don Rufino Contreras, enormously rich, and senator to boot, hang me if I would put myself out of my way to run after an adventurer like Master Kidd, whatever pleasure I might take at other times in the conversation of that worthy caballero."

The senator began laughing.

"Ha! ha! scoundrel; you have scented something."

"Hang it!" the bandit replied, impu-

dently, "I do not deceive myself, and am well aware that whatever attractions my conversation may offer, you would not have come this distance expressly to hear it."

"That is possible, scamp. However, listen to me."

"I can see from your familiarity that the job will be an expensive one; well, I do not dislike that way of entering upon the subject, for it forebodes a good business."

The senator shrugged his shoulders with ill-disguised contempt.

"Enough of this," he said, "let us come to facts."

"I ask nothing better."

"Are you fond of money?"

"I certainly have a weakness for gold."

"Good. Would you hesitate about killing a man to earn it?"

"What do you mean?"

"I ask you, scoundrel, whether in a case of necessity you would kill a man for money?"

"I perfectly understood you."

"Then why make me repeat it?"

"Because your doubt is offensive to my feelings."

"How so?"

"Hang it, I fancy I speak clearly. Killing a man is nothing when you are well paid for it."

"I will pay well."

"Beforehand?"

"Yes, if you like."

"How much?"

"I warn you that the man I refer to is but a poor fellow."

"Yes, a poor fellow who is troublesome to you. Well, go on."

"One thousand piastres. Is that enough?"

"It is not too much."

"Confound it, you are expensive."

"That is possible; but I do my work conscientiously. Well, tell me who the man is that is in your way."

"José Paredes."

"The majordomo at the Toro?"

"Yes."

"Do you know that he is not an easy man to kill? You must owe him a sore grudge, I suppose?"

"I do not know him."

The bandit looked in amazement at the speaker.

"You do not know him, and yet offer one thousand piastres for his death? Nonsense!"

"It is so."

"But you must have a reason. Carai, a man is not killed as one twists a fowl's neck. I know that, bandit though I am."

"You said it just now. He is in my way."

"That is different," the adventurer replied, convinced by this peremptory reason.

"Listen to me attentively, and engrave my words on your mind."

"Go on, senor. I will not lose a word."

"In two or three days the majordomo will leave for Hermosillo, carrying bills to a considerable amount."

"Good," the bandit said, rubbing his hands gleefully; "I will kill him as he passes, and take possession of the bills."

"No, you will let him go on in peace, and you will kill him on his return, when he has cashed the bills."

"That is true. Where the deuce was my head? That will be much better."

Don Rufino looked at him ironically.

"You will deliver to me the sum this man is the bearer of," he said.

The bandit gave a start of alarm.

"I suppose the sum is large?"

"Fifty thousand piastres."

"Viva Dios! Surrender such a fortune?
I would sooner be burned alive."

"You must, though."

"Never, senor."

"Nonsense," the senator remarked, contemptuously. "You know you are in my hands. All the worse for you if you hesitate, for you will then lose two thousand piastres."

"You said one thousand."

"I made a mistake."

"And when will you give them to me?"

"At once."

"Have you the amount about you?"

"Yes."

Suddenly the bandit's eye gleamed with a sinister flash; he drew himself up, and leaped, knife in hand, upon the senator. But the adventurer had a powerful adversary. Don Rufino had long known the man he was treating with, and, while conversing, had not once taken his eye off, and attentively watched all his movements. Hence, though Kidd's action was so rapid,

Don Rufino was before him ; he seized his arm with his left hand, while with the right he placed a pistol to his chest.

"Hilloh, my master," he said, coldly, and with the most perfect tranquillity, "are you mad, or has a wasp stung you?"

Abashed by his failure, the bandit gave him a savage look.

"Let me loose!"

"Not before you have thrown your knife away, scoundrel!"

Kidd opened his hand, the knife fell on the ground, and Don Rufino put his foot upon it.

"You are not half clever enough," he said, sarcastically ; "you deserve to have your brains blown out, in order to teach you to take your measures better another time."

"I do not always miss my mark," he replied, with a menacing accent.

There was a moment of silence between the two men. Stronghand still watched them, not losing one of their words or gestures, which interested him to the highest degree. At length Don Rufino spoke.

"Have you reflected?" he asked the bandit.

"Of what?" the latter remarked, roughly;
"this proposal?"

"Yes."

"Well, I accept."

"But you understand," the senator continued, laying a stress upon every word, "you must deal frankly this time. No trickery, eh?"

"No, no," Kidd answered, with a shake of the head; "you may be sure of that."

"I reckon on your honesty. Moreover, profit by what has occurred to-day. I am not always so good-tempered; and if a misunderstanding, like that just now, again arose between us, the consequences might be very serious to you."

These few words were uttered with an intonation of voice, and accompanied by a look, that produced a profound impression on the bandit.

"All right," he said, shrugging his shoulders savagely; "there is no need to threaten, as all is settled."

"Very good."

"Where shall I come to you after the business?"

"Do not trouble yourself about that. I shall manage to find you."

"Ah!" he said, with a side glance; "then that is your affair?"

"Yes."

"Very good. Give me the money."

"Here it is. But remember, if you deceive me——"

"Nonsense," the bandit interrupted him. "Did I not tell you that it was all settled?"

The senator drew from his pocket a long purse, through whose meshes gold coins could be seen. He weighed it for an instant in his hand, and then threw it twenty paces from him.

"Go and fetch it," he said.

The bandit dashed at the gold, which as it fell produced a ringing sound. Don Rufino took advantage of this movement to get into his saddle.

"Good bye," he said to the bandit. "Remember!" and he started at a gallop. Kidd made no reply, for he was too busy counting the ounces contained in the purse.

"All right," he at last said, with a smile

upon his features, as he hid the purse in his bosom. "No matter," he added, as he looked savagely after the senator, "I allow that I am in your power, demon; but if I ever had you in my hands as you had me to-day, and I manage to discover one of your secrets, I should not be so mad as to show you any mercy."

After this soliloquy the bandit went up to his horse, tightened the girths, and set out in his turn, but in a direction opposite to that which the senator had taken. So soon as he was alone, the hunter rose.

"Oh, oh!" he muttered, "that is a dark plot. That man cannot want to kill Paredes merely to rob him; it is plain that the blow is meant for the Marquis. I will be on my guard."

We have already seen that the hunter religiously kept his promise.

CHAPTER III.

FATHER AND SON.

Now that we have given the reader all necessary information about the events accomplished at the Hacienda del Toro, we will resume our narrative at the point where we were compelled to leave it—that is to say, we will return to the village of the Papagos, and be present at the conversation between Thunderbolt and Stronghand in the Pyramid. The two men, walking side by side, went up to the top of the Pyramid. They traversed the bridge of lianas thrown over the Quebrada at a great height, and entered the Pyramid on the right. They descended to the first floor—the Indians they met bowing respectfully to them—and stopped before a securely fastened door. On reaching it, Thunderbolt gave it two slight

taps; an inner bolt was drawn, the door opened, and they went in. They had scarce crossed the threshold ere the young Indian who had opened the door closed it again after them. A strange change had taken place in the two men; the Indian stoicism they had hitherto affected made way for manners that revealed men used to frequent the highest society of cities.

"Maria," Thunderbolt said to the girl, "inform your mistress that her son has returned to the village."

In giving this order the old gentleman employed Spanish, and not the Comanche idiom which he had used up to the present.

"The senora was already aware of her son's return, *mi amo*," Maria answered, with a smile.

"Ah!" said the old man, "then she has seen somebody."

"The venerable Padre Fray Serapio came an hour ago to pay the senora a visit, and he is still with her."

"Very good; announce us, my child."

The girl bowed and disappeared, returning a moment after to tell the two gentlemen

that they could enter. They were then introduced into a rather spacious room, lighted by four glazed windows—an extraordinary luxury in such a place—in front of which hung heavy red damask curtains. This room, entirely lined with stamped Cordovan leather, was furnished in the Spanish style, with that good taste which only the Castilians of the old race have kept, and was, through its arrangement, half drawing-room, half oratory. In one corner an ebony *prie-dieu*, surmounted by an ivory crucifix, which time had turned yellow, and several pictures of saints, signed by Murillo and Zurbaran, would have caused the apartment to be taken for an oratory, had not comfortable sofas, tables loaded with books, and butaccas, proved it to be a drawing-room. Near a silver brasero two persons were sitting in butaccas.

Of these, one was a lady, the other a Franciscan monk; both had passed mid-life, or to speak more correctly, were close on fifty years of age.

The lady wore the Spanish garb fashionable in her youth—that is to say, some thirty years before. Although her hair was be-

ginning to grow white, and a few deep wrinkles altered the purity of her features, still it was easy to see that she must have been very lovely once on a time. Her skin, of a slightly olive hue, was extremely fine, and in the firm marked lines of her face, the distinctive character of the purest Aztec race could be recognised. Her black eyes, shaded by long lashes, and whose corners rose slightly, like those of the Mongolians, had an expression of strange gentleness, and her whole face revealed mildness and intelligence. Although she was below the ordinary height of women, she still retained the elegance of youth; and her exquisitely modelled hands and feet were almost of a microscopic smallness. Fray Serapio was the true type of the Spanish monk—handsome, majestic, and dreamy—and seemed as if he had stepped out of a picture by Zurbaran. When the two gentlemen entered, the lady and the Padre rose.

“You are welcome, my darling child,” the old lady said, opening her arms to her son.

The latter rushed into them, and for some minutes there was an uninterrupted series of caresses between mother and son.

"Forgive me, Padre Serapio," Stronghand at length said, as he freed himself from the gentle bondage; "but it is so long since I had the pleasure of embracing my mother, that I cannot leave off."

"Embrace your mother, my child," the monk answered, with a smile; "a mother's caresses are the only ones that do not entail regret."

"What are you about, Padre?" Thunderbolt asked; "are you going to leave us already?"

"Yes; and pray excuse me for going away so soon; but after a lengthened separation, you must have much to say to one another, and a third person, however friendly he may be, is always in the way at such a time. Moreover, my brothers and I have a good deal to do at present, owing to so many white hunters and trappers being in the village."

"Are you satisfied with your neophytes?"

The monk shook his head mournfully.

"No," he at length answered; "the Indians love and respect us, owing to the protection you have deigned to afford us, Senor Don——"

"Silence!" the chief interrupted him, with a smile; "no other name but that of Thunderbolt."

"That is true; I always forget that you have surrendered the one received at your baptism; still it is one of the most noble in the martyrology. Well," he continued with a sigh, "the will of Heaven be done! The glorious days of conversion have passed since we have become Mexicans; the Indians no longer believe in the Spanish good faith, and sooner than accept our God, persist in their old errors. This makes me remember that I have a favour to ask of you."

"Of me? Oh, it is granted beforehand, if it be in my power to satisfy you."

"Donna Esperanza, with whom I have spoken about it, leads me to hope that you will not refuse it."

"Did you not say to me one day that the senora's name brought you good luck? It will probably be the same to-day."

The monk took a furtive glance at the old lady.

"This is the matter, my dear," she said, mingling in the conversation; "the good father wishes your authority to follow, with

another monk, the warriors during the coming expedition."

"That is a singular idea, father; and what may your object be? for I presume you do not intend to fight in our ranks."

"No," the monk answered with a smile, "my tastes are not warlike enough for that; but if I may judge from the preparations I see you making, this will be a serious expedition."

"It will," the old man answered pensively.

"I have noticed that generally, during these expeditions, the wounded are left without assistance. I should like to accompany the Indians, in order to attend to their wounds, and console those whose hurts are so serious that they cannot recover; still, if the request appear to you exorbitant, I will recall it, though I shall do so reluctantly."

The old gentleman gazed at the monk for a moment with an expression of admiration and tenderness impossible to describe.

"I grant your request, Padre," he at length said, affectionately pressing his hand.

"Still, I am bound to make one remark."

"What is it?"

"You run a risk of falling into the hands of the Mexicans."

"Well, what matter? Can they regard it as a crime if I perform on the battle-field the duties which my religion imposes on me?"

"Who knows? Perhaps they will regard you as a rebel."

"And in that case——?"

"Treat you as such."

"That is to say——?"

"You will run a risk, father, of being shot; and that is worth thinking about, I suppose."

"You are mistaken, my friend; between duty and cowardice no hesitation is possible. I will die, if it be necessary—but with the conviction that I have fulfilled to the close the sacred mission I have undertaken. Then you grant my request?"

"I do so, father, and thank you for having made it."

"Blessings on your kindness, my son; and now the Lord be with you. I shall retire."

In spite of much pressing, the worthy father insisted on going away, and was con-

ducted to the door of the apartment by the two gentlemen, in spite of his efforts to escape a mark of honour of which he considered himself unworthy. When the door closed after him, and the three persons were really alone, Donna Esperanza, after a long look at her son, gently drew him towards her, and obliging him to sit down on an equipal, she lovingly parted off his forehead his clustering locks, and said in a sweet, harmonious voice, in which all the jealous tenderness of a mother was revealed,—

“I find you sad, Diego; your face is pale, your features are worn, and your eyes sparkle with a gloomy fire. What has happened to you during your absence?”

“Nothing extraordinary, mother,” he answered, with an embarrassment he tried in vain to conceal. “As usual, I have hunted a great deal, travelled a long distance, and consequently, endured great fatigue; hence, doubtless, comes the pallor you notice upon my face.”

The old lady shook her head with an incredulous air.

“A mother cannot be deceived, my boy,” she said, gently. “Since you have been a

man I have seen you return only too often, alas! from long and perilous expeditions. You were fatigued—at times ill, but that was all; while to-day you are gloomy, restless——”

“Mother!”

“Do not argue, for my mind is made up, and nothing will alter it. If you refuse me your confidence, Heaven grant that you may select a confidant who understands you so thoroughly.”

“Oh, mother! this is the first time a reproach has passed your lips.”

“Because, Diego, this is the first time you have refused to let me read your heart.”

The young man sighed and hung his head, without replying. Thunderbolt, who had hitherto been a silent spectator of the scene, gave Donna Esperanza a meaning glance, and walked up to her son.

“Diego,” he said to him, as he laid his hand on his shoulder, “you forget that you have to give me a report of the mission I entrusted to you.”

Stronghand started, and eagerly sprang up.

"That is true, father," he replied; "forgive me. I am ready to furnish you with all the details you desire of what I have been doing during my absence from the village."

"Sit down, my son; your mother and I give you permission."

The young man took a chair, and after reflecting for a few seconds, at a further remark from his father, he commenced the recital of all he had been doing while away. The narrative was long, and lasted nearly two hours; but we will not relate it, because the reader is acquainted with most of the facts the young man stated. Thunderbolt and Donna Esperanza listened without interruption, and gave unequivocal signs of the liveliest interest. When he had concluded his story, his mother fondly embraced him, while congratulating him on his noble and generous conduct. But Thunderbolt regarded the matter from another point of view.

"Then," he asked his son, "the man who arrived with you is the majordomo of this Don Hernando de Moguer?"

"Yes, father."

"Though I am an Indian by adoption, I will not forget that Spanish blood flows in my veins. You will pay this Paredes, as you call him, the amount of the bills, and I will send them to Hermosillo to be cashed hereafter. You did well in bringing him with you, for an honest man must not fall a victim to a villain. Although this affair does not in any way concern us, I am not sorry to do a service to an old fellow-countryman. Let the majordomo leave the village this very night; in order to prevent any accident on the road, you will have him escorted to the hacienda by Whistler and Peccari, and three or four warriors. They will be more than sufficient to frighten any scoundrels that may attempt to stop him; and as, moreover, we are in a direction entirely opposed to that in which the Hermosillo road runs, no one will think of stopping him."

"I can accompany him myself, with your permission, father."

The old gentleman gave him a piercing glance, which compelled him to look down.

"No," he replied; "I want you here."

"As you please, father," he said, with feigned indifference.

And he rose.

"Where are you going?"

"To carry out your orders, father."

"There is no hurry; the day is not very advanced yet, and I want to talk with you; so return to your chair."

The young man obeyed. Thunderbolt reflected for a moment, and then said—

"How do you call this hacienda?"

"El Toro."

"Let me see," the old man continued, as if striving to remember; "is it not built on the exact site of the ancient Cosala?"

"So people say, father."

Donna Esperanza listened to this conversation with considerable anxiety. In vain did she try to discover her husband's meaning, and ask herself why he thus obstinately brought the conversation back to so hazardous a subject.

"Is it not a strong place?" the sachem continued.

"Yes, father; substantially built, and crowned with almenas."

"In truth, I now remember having seen

it formerly; it is an excellent strategical position."

Donna Esperanza looked at her husband with amazement blended with alarm; she could neither account for his coldness nor his persistence. He continued—

"Have you ever entered this hacienda?"

"Never, father."

"That is vexatious; still, I presume you are acquainted with some of its inhabitants. A man cannot save," he added, ironically "the life of such a man as this Don Hernando de Moguer must be, without his trying to testify his gratitude to the man who did him the service."

"I know not whether that is Don Hernando's idea, for I never had the honour of seeing him."

"That is strange, Don Diego; and I cannot understand why you did not try to form his acquaintance; however, that is of little consequence, as far as my plans are concerned."

"Your plans, father?" the young man asked, in amazement.

"I will explain to you that we intend to

commence the expedition with a thunder-stroke; our first attempt will be to seize the Real de Minas of Quitovar, where the main body of the Mexican forces is now collected. The Hacienda del Toro, situated scarce ten leagues from Auspe, commanding the three roads to Hermosillo, Ures, and Sonora, and built at a very strong position, is of immense importance to us for the success of the war. I had thought of appointing you to carry it by surprise, but as you have no friends in the place, and seem not to care greatly about it, let us say no more on the subject. I will give the command of the expedition to Whistler and Peccari; they are two experienced chiefs, endowed with far from common tact, and will carry the hacienda by a surprise, because the Spaniards, not anticipating such an attack, will not be on their guard. As for you, my son, you will follow me to the Real de Minas. And now, my dear Diego, I have nothing more to say to you, and you can withdraw."

The young man had listened in secret horror to this revelation of his father's

plans. He was so full of terror that he did not notice that Thunderbolt, though he pretended at the beginning not to know the hacienda even by name, had described its position with a precision that showed that, on the contrary, he must be perfectly acquainted with it. He stood for a moment crushed by the thought of the terrible danger Donna Marianna would incur if the Apaches took the hacienda. His father took a side glance at him, and attentively watched the various feelings reflected in his face.

"Forgive me, father," the young man at length said, with an effort; "but I should like to offer an objection."

"What is it, my son? Speak; I am listening."

"I do not think it would be prudent to try and surprise, with a band of savages, a house so far advanced in the interior of the country."

"That is why I selected you. You would have taken a band of white and half-breed trappers and hunters, and would have passed unnoticed, owing to the colour of

your skins. Your refusal greatly annoys me, I confess; but, as I do not wish to force your inclinations——”

“But I did not refuse, father,” the young man exclaimed.

“What! you did not refuse?”

“No, father; on the contrary, I ardently wish to be entrusted with this confidential mission.”

“In that case, I misinterpreted your silence and ambiguous remarks. Then you accept?”

“Gladly, father.”

“Very good; that is settled. Now go and send off that Paredes, for it is time for him to return to his master. As for you, my son, breathe not a syllable of what we have discussed; you understand the importance of discretion under such circumstances. Embrace your mother, and leave us.”

The young man threw himself into his mother's arms, who tenderly embraced him, and whispered in his ear, “Hope!”

Then he withdrew, after bowing respectfully to his father.

“Well, Esperanza,” the old gentleman

said, rubbing his hands, so soon as his son had left the room, "do you now begin to guess my plans?"

"No," she answered, with a gentle smile ;
"but I believe that I understand them."

CHAPTER IV.

THE HATCHET.

STRONGHAND quitted the Pyramid in a state of indescribable agitation. The word his mother had whispered in his ear at parting incessantly recurred to his mind, and led him to suppose that Donna Esperanza, with that miraculous intuition Heaven has given to mothers, that they may discover the most hidden feelings of their children, had divined the secret he fancied he had buried in the remotest corner of his heart, and which he did not dare avow to himself. On the other hand, the strange conversation he had held with his father, and the proposal which concluded it, plunged him into extraordinary perplexity. His father's conduct appeared to him extraordinary, in the sense that he did not understand how the old

gentleman, who justly enjoyed among the Indians a reputation for stainless honour, could be preparing treacherously to attack the man to whose succour he came at the same moment with such noble disinterestedness. All this seemed to him illogical, incomprehensible, and in direct opposition with the word "hope," which he fancied he could still hear buzzing in his ear. Still, as he was obliged to cross the torrent, and go some distance before reaching his calli, he had time to restore some degree of order in his ideas, and resume his coolness and self-mastery before he reached his own door. Two men were standing there—Whistler and Peccari.

"Come along, Stronghand," the trapper shouted, so soon as he saw him; "we have been waiting for you a long while."

"Waiting for me?" he asked, in surprise.

"Yes. Sparrowhawk warned us, on the part of Thunderbolt, that the chief and myself were to hold ourselves in readiness to escort the man who entered the village with you wherever he thinks proper to go."

"Ah! Whistler has spoken well," Peccari remarked, laconically.

"What else has happened?"

"Nothing, except that Thunderbolt has made this man a present of a mule, laden with rich wares, as Sparrowhawk says. But go on, and he will tell you about it himself."

Stronghand entered, and found the majordomo busily engaged in making his preparations for a start. So soon as he saw the hunter, Paredes eagerly walked up to him, and shook his hand several times.

"You are welcome, comrade," he said. "Carai! you are a man of your word, so forgive me."

"Forgive you for what?" the young man asked, with a smile.

"For having doubted you, caramba."

"Doubted me?"

"Yes, on my word. When I saw you leave me this morning in this hole, like a useless or noxious animal, I doubted your sincerity. In a word, as you know, anger is an evil counsellor; still, all sorts of stupid thoughts occurred to me, and I was on the point of running away."

"You would have done wrong."

"Carai! I see it now; hence I feel quite

confused at my folly, and beg you once again to forgive me."

"Nonsense," the hunter said, with a laugh, "it is not worth while to torment yourself about such a trifle. An escort of resolute men will accompany you to the hacienda, and as in all probability your master, on seeing that you have brought the money he sent you to fetch, will not ask about what may have happened to you on your journey, I think it unnecessary for you to give him details which would interest him but very slightly, and give rise to unpleasant comments."

"That's enough," the majordomo said, with a knowing smile; "I will not breathe a syllable."

"That will be the best."

"Be easy. Ah! that reminds me that, as I have received the money from you, you must have the bills. Here they are, and once again I thank you."

The hunter took the bills, and concealed them in his bosom. There was a moment of silence. The majordomo walked about the calli with an air of embarrassment, though his purpose was now finished, and

the hunter comprehended that he had something to say, but did not know how to begin it.

"Come," he asked him, "what else is there that troubles you, my friend? Let me hear."

"On my faith," the Mexican replied, at length forming a resolution, "I confess that I should be delighted to prove my gratitude to you for the service you have done me, and I should not like to leave without doing so; but, unluckily, it embarrasses me more than I can express."

"What, is that all?" the hunter said, gaily. "Why, that is a very easy matter."

"Is it?" he remarked, with surprise. "Well, you will not believe that I have been racking my brains over it for more than half an hour, and brought nothing out."

"Because you seek badly, my friend; that is all."

"Then you have found it?"

"You shall see."

"Carai! you cannot imagine what pleasure you will cause me."

"You know that I frequently hunt in your parts?"

"Yes; I am aware of that."

"Well, the first time I find myself near the hacienda, I will come and ask hospitality of you."

"Ah! that is what I call a good idea; and even if you brought ten comrades with you, you would see how I should receive you. I only say this much,—I am in a position to treat you well."

"I take you at your word; so that is settled."

"You pledge me your word?"

"I do."

"Very good. Now I shall start happy. Come by day or night, as you may think proper, and you will always be welcome."

"I fancy it would be rather difficult to get into the hacienda by night."

"Not at all. You will only have to mention my name."

"Well, that is settled; and now be off. Only four hours of daylight remain, so do not delay any longer."

"You are right; so good-bye. Do not be long ere you remind me of my promise."

"I will bear you in mind."

They left the calli. Seven or eight

hunters and Indians were mounted, and awaiting at the door their guest's good pleasure to start. The majordomo shook the hunter's hand for the last time, mounted his horse, gave the signal for departure, and the little band started at a gallop through a crowd of women and children that had collected through curiosity. Stronghand looked after them as long as he could see them, and then thoughtfully returned to the calli. For a very long time he remained plunged in earnest thought; then he stamped his foot passionately, and exclaimed, in Spanish—

“No; a thousand times no. I will not take advantage of the man's kindness to abuse his confidence like a coward. It would be a disgraceful deed.”

These words doubtless contained the result of the hunter's reflections, and were the expression of the resolution he had just formed.

Several days elapsed, and nothing of an interesting nature occurred in the village. The military committee sat several hours during the interval. The plan of the coming campaign was definitively arranged, and the

collection of the Indian forces was the only thing that delayed the outbreak of hostilities. Whistler returned to the village four days after his departure, and reported to the hunter that Paredes reached the hacienda without any accident, and nothing had disturbed the tranquillity of the journey.

In the meanwhile, the different Indian tribes forming the great confederation of the Papazos began flocking into the village. Ere long there were no quarters left for them, and they were compelled to camp on the plain, which, however, was no hardship to men accustomed to brave all weather. On the twelfth day after Paredes' departure, the trachesto convened all the chiefs to a general meeting at sunset, in order to perform the mystic rites of the great medicine before opening the campaign. At the moment when the sun disappeared below the horizon in clouds of purple vapour, the amantzin, or first sorcerer of the nation, mounted the roof of the medicine hut, and by a sign commanded silence.

"The sun has withdrawn its vivifying heat from us," he said in a powerful voice, "the earth is covered with darkness, and

this is the mystic hour when man must prepare for the struggle with the genius of evil—begin the great medicine.”

At the same instant, animals of every description appeared from all the lodges, from the corners of the streets, gliding down the ladders of the pyramids, or coming from the plain; quadrupeds, birds, and reptiles collected in the village square, with horrible cries, overflowed the streets on all sides, and spread out over the country for a league round. These animals were Indian chiefs, clothed in the skins of the beasts they wished to represent. Not only do the Indians imitate with rare perfection the different cries of animals, but they have also made a special study of their manners, habits, mode of progression, and even of the way in which they eat and sleep. Nothing can furnish an idea of the horrible concert composed of these cries—hisses, snapping, and roars, mingled with the furious barking of the dogs. There was in this strange scene something savage and primitive that powerfully affected the imagination. At intervals silence was suddenly re-established, and the sorcerer's voice rose alone in the night.

“Is the evil principle conquered?” he asked; “have my brothers trampled it under foot?”

The animals responded by horrible yells, and the noise began again worse than before. This lasted the whole night through. A few minutes before sunrise the sorcerer repeated the question for the last time, which had hitherto received no other answer but furious yells. This time the pure and melodious voice of a young girl rose in the silence, and pronounced these words:—

“The Master of Life has pity on his red children; he sends the sun to their help; the evil principle is conquered.”

At the same instant the sun appeared in its radiance. The Indians saluted it with a cry of joy, and throwing off their disguises, they fell on their knees with faces turned up to heaven. The sorcerer, holding in his right hand a calabash full of water, in which was a sprig of wormwood, sprinkled a few drops to each of the cardinal points, crying with an inspired air—

“Hail, O sun! visible minister of the invisible Master of Life! listen to the prayers of thy red sons. Their cause is

just; give them the scalps of their enemies, that they may attach them to their waist-belts. Hail, O sun! all hail!"

All the Indians repeated in chorus—

"Hail, O sun! all hail!"

Then they rose to their feet. The first part of the mysteries of the great medicine was accomplished, and the sorcerer retired. The trachesto, or public crier, took his place, and invited the principal chiefs of the confederation to dig up the war-hatchet. This characteristic ceremony consists in going in procession into the medicine lodge, where the oldest chief digs up the ground with his scalping-knife at a spot the sorcerer indicates, and draws out the great war-hatchet, the emblem of the strife about to commence. When the hatchet is unburied, the chiefs quit the hut in the same way as they entered it. At their head marches, between the chief entrusted with the sacred token of the nation and the brave of the great calumet, the chief who has dug up the hatchet, which he holds with both hands to his breast, with the edge turned outwards. On leaving the lodge, chiefs silently draw up in front of the ark of the first man, opposite the war-post, and

chance decides which chief shall have the honour of dealing the first blow on the emblematic post with the sacred hatchet.

The Indians, like all primitive peoples, are extremely superstitious; hence they attach an immense importance to this ceremony, because they fancy they can draw a good omen from the way in which the blow has been dealt, and the depth of the notch made by the edge of the blade. Lots were drawn, and chance selected Stronghand. A flattering murmur greeted this name, which was loved by the Indians, and belonged to a man whom they regarded as one of their greatest heroes. Stronghand quitted the ranks, walked into the open space in front of the ark of the first man, and seizing the hatchet which the chief presented to him, he raised it above his head, whirled it round with extreme dexterity, and then dealt a terrible stroke at the war-post. The blow was dealt with such violence, the hatchet penetrated the wood so deeply, that when the sorcerer attempted to withdraw it, according to the usual custom, in spite of all his efforts he could not succeed, and was obliged to give up the attempt.

The warriors uttered a shout of joy, which, spreading along the crowd assembled to witness the ceremony, was soon converted into a hideous clamour. The war would be lucky. The omens were excellent. Never, even by the confession of the oldest sachems, had such a blow been dealt the post. Strong-hand was congratulated by the chiefs and warriors, who were delighted at the result he had obtained. When the hatchet was at length withdrawn from the post, the warriors retired to make way for the squaws, and the scalp-dance began.

This dance is exclusively performed by women, and in this affair alone the men make way for them. This dance, which is regarded as sacred by the untamed Indian nations, only takes place under grand circumstances—at the beginning of an expedition, or at its close, when it has been successful—that is to say, when the warriors bring back many scalps and horses, and have suffered no loss themselves. The women display an excitement in this dance which speedily degenerates into a frenzy, which fills the minds of the warriors with martial ardour. When this dance was

ended, and the squaws had ceased their insensate cries and gestures, the final ceremony was proceeded with. This ceremony, of which we only find vestiges among a few tribes of the Upper Missouri, and the Aucas, or Pampas Indians, seems peculiar to the Papazos. It consists in sacrificing a brood mare, which has not yet foaled, and reading the future in its entrails.

We can easily understand that the sorcerer who undertakes the explanation says what he pleases, and must be believed through the impossibility of contradicting his statements. On this occasion, either because he wished to share in the general joy, or that, through deceiving others, he had succeeded in deceiving himself, and putting faith in his own falsehoods, he announced to the attentive warriors the most splendid and successful results for the coming expedition. These prophecies were greeted as they deserved to be—that is to say, with the greatest favour—and, according to custom, the body of the mare was given to the sorcerer, and this was, doubtless, the greatest profit he derived from the whole affair.

Then, when all the rites were performed, the order was given for each warrior to prepare his horses, his weapons, and his provisions, for the expedition might set out at any moment. The Papazos chiefs had succeeded in collecting beneath their totems 30,000 warriors, all mounted on excellent horses, and about four thousand armed with guns. It is true that the Indians, though so skilful in the use of the axe, the lance, and the bow, are deplorable marksmen, and have an instinctive dread of firearms, which prevents their taking a proper aim. Still some of them succeed in attaining a relative skill, and are dangerous in a fight. But the greatest strength of the Indian army consisted of the sixty or eighty white and half-breed hunters, whom the hope of plunder had induced to join them.

Thunderbolt, while retaining the supreme command of the army, appointed three chiefs as generals of division; they were Sparrowhawk, Whistler, and Peccari. Stronghand took the command of twenty-five white hunters, whom he selected among the bravest and most honourable, and was entrusted with a special mission by his father. All

being then in readiness to begin the war, the Indians, according to their invariable custom, only awaited a moonless night to invade the territory of their enemies under cover of the darkness.

CHAPTER V.

THE WHITE-SKINS.

THE return of José Paredes to the hacienda caused Don Hernando a lively pleasure. Still, the sum he brought, though considerable, was far from sufficing for the constant outlay in working the mine, and would hardly cover the demands of the moment. Don Rufino did not in any way show the amazement the sight of the majordomo occasioned him, after the measures he had taken to get rid of him. Still this surprise was converted into anxiety, and ere long into terror, when he reflected on the time that had elapsed since his departure.

In fact, it would take three weeks to proceed from the hacienda to Hermosillo and back, even at a good pace, and yet the majordomo had only been absent for nine

days. It was evident to the senator that Paredes had not been to Hermosillo, and yet he brought back the money for the bills! What did all this mean? There was something obscure in the whole affair, which Don Rufino burned to clear up; but, unhappily, that was very difficult, if not impossible.

He was supposed to be ignorant of the motive of the majordomo's journey, and consequently could not interrogate him; and then again, even had he ventured to do so, Paredes would probably not have answered him, or, if he had done so, it would only have been in mockery; for the worthy majordomo, with the infallible scent which upright and faithful men possess, had detected the wolf in sheep's clothing, and although he had no apparent motive, as he was unaware that the senator was the concoctor of the plot to which he had all but fallen a victim, he felt an instinctive aversion for that person, and displayed a marked affectation in trying to avoid any meeting with him.

In Sonora, as in other countries, it is not easy to meet at a moment's notice persons

who will discount large bills to render you a service. The man who had given the money for these must be very rich, and most desirous to assist the Marquis. However much the senator thought of the subject, he could not call to mind any landowner for fifty leagues round capable of acting in such a way. Moreover, the discounteer must have been aware of the plot formed against the majordomo, for otherwise he would not have proposed to take the bills. Could Kidd be the traitor? In a moment the senator recognised the absurdity of such a suspicion. It was not probable that the bandit had declined to kill the majordomo; but that he should have allowed him to escape without robbing him was an utterly unlikely circumstance. Moreover, Kidd had everything to fear from the senator, and would not have risked playing him such a malicious trick.

As always happens when a man indulges in probabilities without any settled starting-point, and proceeds from one deduction to another, Don Rufino attained such a monstrous conclusion, that he was really terrified by it. Still, throughout all his

wanderings, a very logical remark escaped him, which proved that, if he had not discovered the truth, he was not very far from it.

"The red-skins are right," he muttered, "and their proverb is true. In the desert, trees have ears, and leaves have eyes. I remember that my conversation with that picaro of a Kidd took place near a very close-growing thicket; perhaps it contained a traitor. Henceforward I will only discuss business at the top of an entirely unwooded hill; and yet," he added with a sigh, "who knows whether a spy may not be concealed in a prairie dog-hole?"

All these reflections the senator made while walking in extreme agitation up and down the room, when the door opened, and Don Ruiz made his appearance.

"Senor Don Rufino," he said to him, after a mutual exchange of compliments, "will you kindly come to the drawing-room? Our majordomo, who, as you may have noticed, has been absent for some days, has brought most important news, which my father would like you to hear."

The senator started imperceptibly, and

gave the young man a suspicious glance ; but nothing in Don Ruiz's open face caused him to suppose any hidden meaning in his words.

"Is anything extraordinary happening, my dear Don Ruiz?" he asked, in a mellifluous voice.

"I have as yet received but very imperfect information about the grave events that threaten us ; but if you will kindly follow me, you will soon learn all."

"Be it so, my dear sir—I am at your service ;" and he followed Don Ruiz to the saloon, where Donna Marianna, the Marquis, and José Paredes were already assembled.

"Why, what can be the matter, my dear senor?" the senator asked, as he entered ; "I confess that Don Ruiz has startled me."

"You will be more startled when you know the events. But sit down, pray," the Marquis answered, and then said to the majordomo, "you have your information from a good source?"

"I can assert that all I have told you is true, *mi amo*. The Papazos have allied

themselves with I know not how many other tribes of ferocious pagans, and we may expect to see them burst upon us at any moment."

"Caspita! that is serious," the senator said.

"Much more than you suppose; for the Indians are this time resolved to expel the white men for ever from Sonora, and establish themselves in their place," answered Paredes.

"Oh, oh," Don Rufino said, "they are undertaking a rude task."

"Laugh if you like, but it is so."

"I do not laugh, my worthy friend; still, I do not believe the Indians capable of attempting so mad an enterprise."

"In the first place, I am not your friend, senor," the majordomo said, roughly; "and next, it is probable that when you have seen the Indians at work your opinions about them will be considerably modified."

The senator pretended not to notice the bitterness contained in this remark, and replied, lightly—

"I never saw any wild red-skins, and Heaven preserve me from doing so. Still,

I strongly suspect the inhabitants of this country of making them more formidable than they really are."

"You are wrong to have such an opinion, my friend; and if you remain any time with us, you will soon have proof of it," the Marquis said.

"Are you going to remain here, exposed to the attacks of the pagans, papa?" Donna Marianna asked, with terror.

"We have nothing to fear from the Indians," the Marquis replied. "The rock on which my hacienda is built is too hard for them. They will break their nails before they can pull out a single stone."

"Still, father, we cannot be too prudent," Don Ruiz observed.

"You are right, my son; and as I do not wish your sister to retain even a shadow of anxiety, we will immediately place ourselves in a position of defence, though it is unnecessary. During the grand insurrection of 1827, the Indians did not once attempt to approach El Toro, and I greatly doubt whether they will attack it this time."

"*Mi amo*," Paredes replied, "believe me, do not neglect any precaution; this insurrection will be terrible."

"Come, come," Don Rufino asked, "tell me, Senor Majordomo, who the person is that informed you so well?"

Paredes gave him a side glance, and replied, with a shrug of his shoulders—

"It is enough that I know it; no matter the name of the man to whom I owe the information. If you fancy that it is a friend who warned me, you will be near the truth."

"Permit me, senor," the senator answered, with a frown, "this is more important than you fancy. You must not thus create an alarm in a family, and then refuse to give proofs in support of your assertions."

"My master knows me, senor; he knows that I am devoted to him, and also that I am incapable of uttering a falsehood."

"I do not doubt, senor, either your honesty or your truthfulness; still, a thing so serious as you announce requires, before being taken into consideration, to be based on evidence with proofs, or a respectable name, in default of anything else."

"Stuff! stuff! the main point is to be on your guard."

"Yes, when we know whether we really

ought to do so. Consequently, in my quality as a magistrate—and I ask the Senor Marquis a million pardons for acting thus in his presence—I command you to reveal to me at once the name of the man who gave you these alarming news.”

“Nonsense!” the majordomo said, with a shrug of his shoulders; “what good would it do if I were to tell you the name of an individual you do not know, and whom you never heard mentioned?”

“That is not the question. Be good enough to answer me, if you please.”

“It is possible that you may be a magistrate, senor, and I do not care if you are. I recognise no other masters but the Senor Marquis and his children here present; they alone have the right to question me, and them alone I will answer.”

The senator bit his lips, and turned to the Marquis.

“Come, Paredes, answer,” the latter said. “I really do not at all understand your obstinacy.”

“Since you order me to speak, *mi amo*,” the majordomo continued, “you must know that the person who told me of the insur-

rection of the pagans is a white hunter, called Stronghand."

"Stronghand?" brother and sister exclaimed simultaneously.

"Is not that," the Marquis asked, "the hunter to whom we already are so greatly indebted?"

"Yes, *mi amo*," the majordomo replied, musingly; "and it is probable that he has not yet finished."

Although it was the first time the senator heard the hunter's name mentioned, by a kind of intuition he felt a species of emotion for which he could not account.

"Oh," Donna Marianna cried, eagerly, "we must place entire confidence in Stronghand's statements."

"Certainly we must," Don Ruiz added. "It is plain that he wished to warn us, and put us on our guard."

"But who is this man who inspires you with such profound sympathy?" the senator asked.

"A friend," Donna Marianna replied, warmly, "for whom I shall feel an eternal gratitude."

"And whom we all love," the Marquis added, with emotion.

"Then you accept his bail for Paredes?"

"Yes; and believe me, my friend, that I shall not neglect the advice he gives me."

"Very good, senor; you will therefore permit me to remark that Senor Paredes' obstinacy in not revealing his name must fairly appear to me extraordinary."

"Senor Rufino, Paredes is an old servant who enjoys a very pardonable freedom, and believes that he has acquired the right of being believed on his word. Now," he added, "let us discuss the means to prevent a surprise. Paredes, you will at once mount your horse, and order all the peons and vaqueros to bring the ganado and horses into the hacienda. You, Don Ruiz, will prepare the necessary corrals and cuartos to lodge the men and animals; collect as much forage and provisions as you can, for, in the event of a siege, we must not run the risk of being reduced by famine. How many peons have you under your orders, Paredes?"

"Excellency, we have about eighty able to bear arms and do active duty, without counting the women, children, and old men, whom we can always turn to some account."

"Oh, oh," the Marquis said, "there are many more than we require; I see that it will be unnecessary to summon our miners from Quitovar."

"The more so," Paredes objected, "because Captain de Niza, whose position is far more exposed than ours, will already have enlisted them in his service."

"That is probable," the Marquis answered, as he rose. "Go and carry out my orders without delay."

The majordomo bowed to his master, and went out.

"Will it please you, senor, to grant me a moment's interview?" the senator then said.

"I am at your orders, senor."

"Oh, do not disturb yourselves," the senator said, addressing Don Ruiz and his sister, who had risen to leave the room; "I have nothing secret to say to the Marquis."

The young people sat down again.

"I confess to you that what this man has just said," Don Rufino continued, "has greatly startled me. I never saw any Indian bravos, and have a horrible fear of them. I should therefore wish, Don Hernando, how-

ever strange so sudden a request may appear to you, to obtain your permission to leave you so soon as possible."

"Leave me!" the Marquis replied, with amazement, "at this moment?"

"Yes; it seems as if coming events will be very serious. I am not a man of war, nor anything like it, for I am frightened at anything that bears a likeness to a quarrel; but Congress claims my immediate presence at Mexico, were it only to inform the Government of the situation in which this state is, and urge it to assume energetic measures."

"Senor Don Rufino, you are at liberty to act as you please. Still, I fear that the roads are not quite safe, and that you will expose yourself to serious dangers by obstinately insisting on departing."

"I have thought of that; but I fancy that when I have once reached Arispe, which is no great distance from here, I shall have nothing more to fear. Will you allow Don Senor Ruiz to escort me to that town?"

"I can refuse you nothing, senor. My son will accompany you, since you do him the honour of desiring his escort."

"Yes," the senator continued, taking a side glance at Donna Marianna, who had let her head drop on her chest; "I wish to entrust Don Ruiz with an important letter for you."

"Why write? it would be far more simple to tell me what you wish in a couple of words."

"No! no! that is impossible," Don Rufino answered, with a smile that resembled a grimace; "that would demand too much time: moreover, dear sir, you know better than I do that there are certain things which can only be settled by ambassadors."

"As you please, senor. When do you propose to start?"

"I frankly confess that, in spite of the regret I feel at leaving you, I fancy that the sooner I set out the better."

"It is only ten o'clock," said Don Ruiz, as he rose; "by hurrying a little, we can reach Arispe to-night."

"Famous! that is better. Allow me, Don Hernando, to take leave of you, as well as of your charming daughter, and pray accept my thanks for the noble hospitality I have received in your mansion."

"What! are you not afraid of travelling in the great heat of the day?"

"I only fear the sight of the Indians, and that fear is enough to make me forget all others. Excuse me, therefore, for leaving you so suddenly, but I feel convinced that I should die of terror if I heard the war-cry of those frightful savages echo in my ears."

Don Ruiz had left the room to give the requisite orders, and his sister followed him, after making a silent curtesy to the senator, whose intention she was far from suspecting. The apprehension expressed by Don Rufino was greatly exaggerated, if it was not entirely fictitious; but he instinctively felt that the ground was beginning to burn beneath his feet at the hacienda, and he wanted to get away, not only to guard himself against the perils he foresaw from the ill success of his plot, but also to try and refasten the broken threads of his intrigue, and carry out his plans with the shortest possible delay.

The revolt of the Indians, by interrupting the work, paralyzing commercial transactions, and consequently creating enormous difficulties for the Marquis, admirably as-

sisted the senator in the realization of the plans he had long been forming in the dark. Moreover he desired, during the short ride he was going to take with Don Ruiz, to obtain in the young man a precious ally, who would serve him the better because he would do so without any after-thought, and without seeing Don Rufino's object. He also thought it better to write and detail his intentions to the Marquis in a letter, rather than discuss them with him, for the grand diplomatic reason that the man who writes is the only speaker, must be heard, and consequently does not fear a refutation till he has completely explained his ideas.

After a few moments, Don Ruiz returned to state that the escort had mounted, and that all was ready for a start. Don Rufino repeated his farewells to the Marquis, but the latter would not let him depart before he had drunk, according to the hospitable fashion of the country, the stirrup-cup—that is to say, a glass of iced orangeade. Then all three left the room, for in spite of the entreaties and objections of the senator, his host insisted on accompanying him to the patio, and witnessing his departure.

Two minutes later, Don Rufino Contreras, accompanied by Don Ruiz, and followed by six confidential peons, well armed and mounted, left the hacienda, and took the direction of Arispe, which they reached at nightfall; after a rather fatiguing journey, it is true, but which, however, was not troubled by any accident of an alarming nature. The only thing the travellers noticed, and which proved to them how thoroughly the news of an approaching invasion of the Indians had spread along the border, was the complete solitude of the country, which resembled a desert.

All the ranchos they passed were deserted; the doors, windows, and furniture had been removed by the inhabitants, and carried off by them in their flight; they had burned or destroyed all they were compelled to leave behind them; their horses and cattle had also disappeared, which gave a look of indescribable melancholy to the numerous plains the little party crossed. The crops had been cut in the green, or burned, in order that the Indians might not profit by them; and thus, ere the wretched country

was ravaged by the red-skins, it had already been completely ruined by its inhabitants.

Don Rufino contemplated with stupor the desolate aspect of the country, for he could not at all understand the strange tactics of the inhabitants. When they reached the gates of Arispe, they found them closed, and guarded by powerful detachments of soldiers and *civicos*—a species of national militia, paid by the rich inhabitants to repress the devastation of the marauders who swarm on the Indian border. It was only after interminable debates and infinite precautions that the barrier guards at length consented to let the travellers pass. All the streets in Arispe were defended by strong barricades. The town resembled one large camp. The soldiers were bivouacked on all the squares, and sleeping round the bivouac fires, which were lighted as much to keep off the sharp night cold, as to cook their scanty rations.

Don Rufino possessed, on the Plaza Mayor of Arispe, a large and handsome mansion, at which he resided when business summoned him to Arispe. It took him more than an hour to reach it, owing to the

numberless turnings he was compelled to take, and the barricades he was forced to scale. The door of the house was open, and a dozen soldiers were quietly bivouacked in the saguan and patio; but Don Rufino did not at all protest against this arbitrary violation of his domicile; on the contrary, he boasted of his senatorial title, and seemed very pleased with the liberty the soldiers had taken. Don Rufino would not allow Don Ruiz and his peons to seek a shelter anywhere but in his own house; he forced them to accept his hospitality, and they did so without any excessive pressure, for both men and horses were beginning to feel the want of a few hours' rest, after an entire day's journey, made in the stifling heat of the sun.

CHAPTER VI.

SERIOUS EVENTS.

Nothing equals the rapidity with which a new fortune is established, except, perhaps, that with which an old family falls, through the eternal balancing of accident, which elevates some and lowers others, thus producing incessant contrasts, which are one of the claims of existing society, and of the equilibrium that presides over the things of this world. With a few exceptions, the first and last of a race are always two powerful men, created by the struggle, endowed with great and noble qualities, and who are always equal to circumstances. Unfortunately, of these two men, one, sustained by capricious chance and the benign influence of his star, sees all obstacles fall before him, and his rashest combinations

succeed. In a word, success frequently crowns his efforts, contrary to his expectations. The other, on the contrary, unconsciously yielding through the law of contrast to the malign influence attaching to his race—having fallen by the fault of his predecessors from an elevated position—compelled to struggle on unequal terms with enemies prejudiced against him, and who render him responsible for the long series of errors of which his ancestors have been solely culpable—sees himself, so to speak, placed without the pale of the common law; his most skilful combinations only succeed in delaying for a few years an inevitable fall, and frequently render that fall the more startling and certain.

What we say here is applicable to all the degrees of the social stage; not only to royal families, but to the miserable beggar's brood. Each revolution that changes the face of an empire, by bringing up to the surface unknown geniuses, at the same time plunges into an abyss of wretchedness and opprobrium those who for centuries have oppressed entire generations, and have in their time placed themselves on a level

with the Deity, by believing everything allowed them.

Time, that impassive leveller, bringing progress in its train, incessantly passes its inexorable square over all that raises its head too high—thus pleasing itself by raising some and humiliating others. It has constituted itself the sole arbiter of human ambitions, and the real representative of that moral equality which would be an Utopia, if the great organic law of the harmony of the universe had not thus proclaimed its astonishing principles.

On the very day when Don Ruiz, after escorting Don Rufino Contreras to Hermosillo, returned to the hacienda, a courier arrived simultaneously with him. This man, who was mounted on an utterly exhausted steed, had apparently ridden a great distance, and was in an excessive hurry. No sooner had he reached the Toro than he was introduced into the Marquis's study, with whom he remained shut up for a long time. Then the courier, on leaving the study, remounted his horse, and set off again without speaking to a soul. The almost fantastic apparition of this man

caused the occupiers of the hacienda that instinctive fear which people generally experience from things they cannot account for.

The Marquis, whose face was usually imprinted with an expression of sad and resigned melancholy, had, after this interview, become of a cadaverous pallor; deep wrinkles furrowed his forehead, and his eyes stared wildly. He walked up and down the huerta for a long time in extreme agitation, with his arms crossed on his back, and his head bowed over his chest. At times he stopped, beat his forehead furiously, uttered incoherent words, and then resumed his walk mechanically—obeying an imperious want of locomotion rather than any other motive.

Donna Marianna, seated at a window of her boudoir, behind a muslin curtain, followed her father's movements, for she felt frightened at his state, and had a foreboding that she would have to share some of the sorrow which had fallen on him. The Marquis at length stopped, looked round him like a man who is waking up, and, after a moment of reflection, returned to his

apartments. A few minutes after, a servant came to inform Donna Marianna that her father was awaiting her in the red chamber. In spite of herself, the maiden felt her apprehensions redoubled, but hastened to obey.

This red chamber, into which we have already had opportunity to introduce the reader, and which Don Hernando had not entered since the day when his brother was so inexorably disinherited by their father, was as cold and gloomy as when we saw it. The sole difference was, that time, by tarnishing the lustre of the hangings and tapestry, and blackening the furniture, had imparted to it a tinge of sadness, which made the visitor shudder as soon as he entered. When Donna Marianna reached the red chamber, she found her father already there; he gave her a silent sign to take a seat, and she sank into an armchair in a state of undisguised alarm. A few minutes after Don Ruiz entered, followed by José Paredes. The Marquis then seated himself in the spacious armchair that occupied the centre of the dais; he ordered the majordomo to close the door, and began in a feeble, trembling voice—

“My children, I have summoned you hither because we have to discuss matters of the deepest gravity. I have called to our council Paredes, as an old servant of the family, whose devotion we have known so long, and I trust you will not think that I have exceeded my rights in doing so.”

The young people bowed their assent. Paredes placed himself by their side, and the Marquis continued—

“My children, our family has for many years been tried by adversity. Hitherto, respecting the happy carelessness of childhood, I have sought to keep within my own breast the annoyances and grief with which I was incessantly crushed; for, after all, of what good would it have proved to lay a portion of the burden on your shoulders? Misfortune advances with gigantic strides; it catches us up one after the other, and it was better to let you enjoy the too short days of your happy youth. I have therefore struggled for all of us, concealing the grief which at times overwhelmed me, restraining my tears, and always offering to you the calm brow and the tranquil appearance of a man who, if he were not entirely

happy, was satisfied with the share of good and evil Heaven had allotted to him. Believe me, my children, I should have continued this conduct, and kept to myself all the cares and annoyances of such a life as I lead, had not a sudden, terrible, and irremediable misfortune, which has fallen on me to-day, forced me, against my will, to impart to you the melancholy, frightful condition we are now in, and acquaint you with the posture of my affairs, which are yours, for I am only entrusted with the fortune which will be yours some day if we succeed in saving it."

The Marquis stopped for a moment, overcome by the emotion which contracted his throat.

"Father," Don Ruiz replied, "you have ever been the best of parents to my sister and myself. Be assured that we have anxiously awaited this confidence, which has been so long delayed in the fear of causing us a temporary sorrow; for we hoped we might be able to assume a portion of the burden, and thus restore you the courage necessary to support the gigantic struggle in which you have engaged with adverse fortune."

"My son," the Marquis said, "I know your heart and your sister's. I am aware of the respectful affection you feel for me; and in the misfortune that is now bursting on me, it is a great satisfaction to have the intimate conviction that my children will heartily combine in supporting and consoling me."

"Be kind enough then, father, to tell us what the matter is, without farther delay. The courier with whom you were shut up so long this morning cannot be a stranger to the determination you have formed. Doubtless he was the bearer of evil tidings?"

"Alas! my son," the Marquis answered, "for some years past fortune has been treating our house with incomprehensible severity; everything is leagued against us, and our fortune, which was immense under the Spanish rule, has constantly diminished since the proclamation of Mexican independence. In vain have I tried to contend against the torrent which carried us away; in vain have I forgotten all I owe to my name and rank, and attempted to regain what I had lost by honourable enterprise. All has been of no avail, and my efforts have only served to

prove the inutility of my attempts. Still, I had hoped a few days back that I should be able to render fortune more favourable to me. I foresaw a chance of saving some fragments of our old fortunes; but to-day I have attained the melancholy conviction that I am entirely ruined unless a miracle intervene."

"Oh, things cannot be so bad as that, father!" Donna Marianna exclaimed.

"Yes, my children, we are ruined—reduced to utter misery," the Marquis continued sadly. "We have lost everything; even this hacienda, built by one of our ancestors, which will be speedily sold—perhaps to-morrow—for the benefit of our creditors."

"But how has such a great misfortune occurred?"

"Alas! in the same way as misfortunes always happen when fate has resolved on ruining a man. For a long time past business has been in a state of collapse, owing to the disastrous negligence of the Government; and the news of the fresh revolt of the Indian mansos and bravos has raised the alarm of the merchants to the highest

pitch. The panic is general among the bankers and persons whose capital is engaged in mines; several houses at Hermosillo, Ures, Arispe, Sonora, and even Mexico, have already suspended payment, and thus everything has been paralyzed at a single blow. Then, to complicate matters even more, a pronunciamento has taken place in Mexico, and at this moment we have not only an Indian border war, but the interior of the country is suffering from all the horrors of a civil war."

"Do you know this officially, father?"

"Unfortunately, I cannot entertain the slightest doubt on the subject. For this reason; under such circumstances as the present, one thing inevitably happens. Creditors insist on the immediate repayment of their advances, while persons indebted to you, if they do not fail, defer payment so long that it is practically of no service. Now, the letters I received this morning, and they are numerous, may be divided into two classes; my debtors refuse to pay me, while my creditors, fearing a loss, have taken out writs against me, so that if I have not paid them within eight days the round sum of

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380,000 piastres, I shall be declared bankrupt, imprisoned, expelled from my estate, and this hacienda, the last thing left us, will be put up to auction, and probably purchased for a trifle by one of the ex-vassals of our family, who has grown rich at our expense, and does not blush to take our place."

"Three hundred and eighty thousand piastres!" Don Ruiz muttered with stupor.

"That is the amount."

"How can we possibly get it together?"

"It is useless to dream of it for the present, my son. This hacienda alone is worth double. At other times I could have offered a mortgage, and as I have nearly 300,000 piastres owing to me, you see that I could have easily confronted this fresh stroke of fortune. But now it cannot be thought of; it will be better to give way, and allow our creditors to divide the spoil. I hope you do not suppose, Ruiz, that I have the intention of defrauding my creditors of the little that is left me?"

"Oh no, father; but what do you propose doing?"

"Carai!" Paredes then said, "that is easily settled. I possess, through the

liberality of the Moguer family, a rancho, which owes nothing to anybody. It is yours, *mi amo*. My mother and I can easily find another shelter. Well, if this wretched lodging is not so fine or handsome as this, it will, at any rate, afford you a shelter, and save you from applying for it to strangers. Is it so, excellency? Will you honour the old house of your servant by your presence?"

The Marquis seemed to reflect for a moment, and then held out his hand to Paredes, who kissed it.

"Be it so, my friend. I accept your offer," he said. "Not that I intend to inconvenience you for any length of time, but merely during the few days I shall require to save, if possible, some fragments of my children's fortune from the general shipwreck."

"Do not think of us, father," Donna Marianna said, with emotion. "We are young, and will work."

Paredes was delighted at the acceptance of his offer.

"Oh, do not be frightened, *mi amo*," he said; "the old rancho is not so dilapidated and miserable as might be supposed. I

trust, with the help of Heaven, that you will not be very uncomfortable there, and, at any rate, you will have no cause to fear the visits of certain parties."

"You are unjust, Paredes," the Marquis replied. "Don Rufino Contreras, to whom you allude, is one of my best friends, and I must speak of his behaviour in the highest terms of praise."

"That is possible, *mi amo*, that is possible," the majordomo said, shaking his head with an air of conviction; "but if I may be permitted to express an opinion about that gentleman, I fancy we had better wait a while before fully making up our minds about him."

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing, *mi amo*, really nothing. I have an idea, that is all."

"That reminds me, father, that on leaving me, Don Rufino gave me a letter, which he begged me to deliver to you so soon as I reached the hacienda."

"Yes; he informed me of his intention of writing."

"Hum!" the majordomo said, between his teeth, but loudly enough for the Marquis

to hear him; "I always had a bad idea of men who prefer blackening paper to explaining themselves frankly in words."

During this aside, the Marquis had opened and read the letter.

"This time, at any rate," he said, "Don Rufino cannot be accused of want of frankness, or of not explaining himself clearly. He warns me of the measures taken against me, and after showing me, in a most gentlemanly manner, the precarious nature of my position, he ends by offering me the means of escaping from it in the most honourable way; in one word, he asks for my daughter's hand, and offers her a dowry of one and a half million piastres, besides liquidating my debts."

Donna Marianna was crushed by the blow so suddenly dealt her. The Marquis continued, with the bitter accent he had hitherto employed—

"Such is the state we have reached, my children; we, the descendants of a race of worthies noble as the king, and whose escutcheon is unstained, have so fallen from our lofty social position, that we are too greatly honoured by the offer of a man whose

grandfather was our vassal. But such is the way of the world, and why blame it when we live in an age in which everything is possible?"

"What answer will you give to this strange letter, father?" Don Ruiz asked, anxiously.

Don Hernando drew himself up proudly.

"My son," he replied, "however poor I may be, I do not the less remain the Marquis de Moguer, the only thing, perhaps, which cannot be taken from me. I know the obligations I owe to the honour of my name. Your sister is free to accept or reject the offer made her. I do not wish, under any pretext, to influence her determination in so serious a matter. She is young, and has still many years to live; I have no right to enchain her existence with that of a man she does not love. She will reflect, and follow the impulse of her own heart. Whatever her resolution may be, I approve of it beforehand."

"Thanks, father," the maiden answered, gently. "And now grant me a last favour."

"What is it, my child?"

"I wish for a week before answering this request, for I am so surprised and confused that it would be impossible for me to form any resolution at present."

"Very good, my child ; in eight days you will give me your answer. And now withdraw : but do you remain, Paredes ; before leaving the hacienda for ever, I wish to make some arrangements in which your help will be necessary."

Brother and sister, after bowing respectfully to their father, slowly quitted this fatal chamber, which persons never entered save through a misfortune.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TIGRERO.

DON RUIZ and his sister left the red chamber together, gloomy, sad, and despairing, and not daring to communicate their impressions, because they knew that they had nothing to hope from an exchange of conventional consolation. When they reached the hall whence ran the stairs leading to their different suites of rooms, Don Ruiz let loose his sister's arm, and kissed her on the forehead.

"Courage, Marianna," he said, gently.

"Are you leaving me, brother?" she remarked, with a slight tinge of reproach in her voice.

"Are you not going to your own rooms?" he asked her.

"And what do you intend doing?"

"To tell you the honest truth, sister," he replied, "after what has occurred in the red chamber, I feel in such a state of excitement, that I want to breathe the fresh air; did I not, I fancy I should be ill."

"Do you propose going out then?"

"In leaving you, my dear sister, it is my firm intention to saddle Santiago, and ride about the country for two or three hours."

"If that be the case, Ruiz, I will ask you to do me a service."

"What is it?"

"Saddle Madrina at the same time."

"Your mare?"

"Yes."

"Are you going out too?"

"I want to pay a visit to my nurse, whom I have not seen for a long time. I am anxious to speak a few words with her."

"Will you go alone to the rancho?"

"Unless you give me the pleasure of your company."

"Do you doubt it, sister?"

"Yes and no, Ruiz."

"Why this reticence?"

"I will explain it to you, brother. To be frank with you, I want to see my nurse, and I may spend the night at the rancho; in the event of that happening, I do not wish you to make an attempt to dissuade me by entreaty or otherwise."

"Reflect, sister, that the country is not tranquil, and that you may incur danger in a wretched rancho, where any resistance would be impossible."

"I have thought of that, and calculated all the chances. But I repeat to you, I must go to the rancho, and may be obliged to pass there not only a night, but a day or two."

Don Ruiz reflected for a moment.

"Sister," he then said, "you are no ordinary woman, and everything you do is carefully calculated. Although you do not tell me the motives for this visit, I guess that they are serious, and hence will make no attempt to thwart your wishes. Act as you please, and I will do all you wish."

"Thank you, Ruiz," she answered, warmly; "I anticipated you would say that, for you understand me: my visit has a serious motive, as you have divined."

"Then I will go and saddle the horses," he remarked, with a smile.

"Do so, brother," she replied, as she gently pressed his hand. "I will wait for you here."

"I only require five minutes."

The young man went out. Donna Marianna leant on the balustrade, and fell into deep thought. Don Ruiz returned, leading the horses by the bridle: brother and sister mounted, and at once left the hacienda. It was about four in the afternoon; the great heat of the day was spent, the birds were singing gaily beneath the foliage; the sun, now level with the lowest branches, had lost much of its heat; and the coming breeze, which was beginning to rise, refreshed the atmosphere, and bore far away the clouds of mosquitoes which had for several hours darkened the air. The young people galloped silently side by side, absorbed in their thoughts, and only taking absent glances at the splendid scenery unfolded around them as they advanced further into the country. They thus reached the rancho without exchanging a word.

Bouchaley, faithful to his friendship for

Donna Marianna, had long before announced her arrival to the inhabitants of the rancho, who had hurried out to welcome her. With a hurried glance, Marianna assured herself of the presence of her foster-brother, which seemed to cause her great satisfaction.

"Goodness! you here so late, nina?" the ranchero said, in his delight; "what blessed wind has blown you?"

"The desire of seeing you, *madresita*," the young lady answered, with a smile; "it is so long since I embraced you, that I could not wait any longer."

"It is a good idea, nina," the ranchero said; "unfortunately it is late, and we shall only be able to converse with you for a few moments."

"How do you know, old father?" she replied, as she leaped off her horse, and threw her arms round his neck; "who told you I should not spend the night at the rancho?"

"Oh, oh, you would not do us that honour, nina," the old man answered.

"You are mistaken, father, and the proof is that I ask my brother to leave me here, and return alone to the hacienda."

"Then I am discharged," Don Ruiz said, laughingly.

"Yes, brother ; but you have no cause of complaint, for I warned you."

"That is true ; hence I do not complain, little sister ; still, before we part, tell me at what hour I am to come and fetch you to-morrow."

"Do not trouble yourself about that, Ruiz ; Marianno will bring me home."

"And this time I shall not behave as the last nina : may the Lord confound me if I lose sight of you even for a moment," the tigrero said, as he took the horse's bridle to lead it to the corral.

"Will you be so cruel, Marianna," Ruiz observed, "as to force me thus to return at once?"

"No ; I grant you an hour to rest and refresh yourself, but when that time has elapsed you will start."

"Agreed, little sister."

They entered the rancho : No Sanchez, with that hospitable speed all Mexican rancheros display, had already covered the table with pulque, mezcal, Catalonian refino, orangeade, and infusion of tamarinds. The

young people, thirsty from their long ride, and not wishing to grieve the worthy persons who received them so kindly, did honour to the refreshments thus profusely offered them. Don Ruiz, while teasing his sister about her strange fancy for spending the night at the rancho, though he felt convinced that she must have a very serious reason for it, conversed gaily according to his fashion, and displayed a dazzling wit which is easier in Mexico than elsewhere; for, owing to the natural intelligence of the people, no matter their rank, they are certain to understand. When day began to fall, the young gentleman took leave of the rancheros, mounted his horse, and started for the hacienda.

In Mexico, as in all intertropical countries, evening is the pleasantest part of the day: at that time the inhabitants are all in the open air. At night they sit in front of the rancho doors, conversing, singing, or dancing; two or three in the morning arrives before they dream of going to bed. But on this day, contrary to her habit when she paid her nurse a visit, Donna Marianna seemed fatigued: at times she had difficulty in

checking a yawn, and her desire for rest was so evident that the nurse was the first to invite her to retire. The young lady required no pressing, and after bidding the old folks good night, entered the rancho, and the room prepared for her. So soon as Marianna had left them the old couple also retired to rest. As for Marianno, after making his usual tour of inspection round the rancho, he hung up a hammock under the portico, as he preferred sleeping in the open air to being shut up within walls which the sun's heat had rendered stifling. An hour later all the inhabitants of the rancho were plunged into the deepest sleep.

Suddenly the tigrero felt a hand gently laid on his shoulder; he opened his eyes, and by the light of the stars, which was as brilliant as day, recognised Donna Marianna. The young man, who had thrown himself fully dressed upon the hammock, started up, and looked at his foster-sister anxiously.

"What is the matter with you, nina?" he asked, in evident alarm.

"Silence, Marianno!" she answered in a low voice, and laying her finger on her lips;

"all is quiet, at least I suppose so, but I wish to speak with you."

"Go on, tocaya," he replied, as he leaped from the hammock and folded it up.

"Yes, but I am sorry at having waked you; you were sleeping so soundly, that I looked at you for nearly a quarter of an hour ere I dared to disturb your rest; for sleep is such a blessed thing."

"Nonsense," he answered with a laugh: "you were wrong, nina; we wood-rangers sleep so quickly that an hour is sufficient to rest us, and if I am not mistaken, I have been lying down for more than two. Hence speak, nina; I am attentive, and shall not miss a word of what you say to me."

The young lady reflected for a moment.

"You love me, I think, Marianno?" she at length said, with a certain hesitation in her voice.

"Like a sister, nina," he said, warmly; "in truth, are we not tocayo and tocaya? Why ask such a question?"

"Because I want you to do me an important service."

"Me, nina? Carai! do not be alarmed;

I am devoted to you body and soul, and whatever you may ask——”

“Do not pledge yourself too hastily, to-day,” she interrupted him with a meaning laugh.

“A man cannot do that when he firmly intends to keep his promise.”

“That is true; still there are things from which a man at times recoils.”

“There may be such, nina, but I do not know them; however, explain your wishes to me frankly.”

“I think, Marianno, that you are on friendly terms with the hunter called Stronghand?”

“Very intimate, nina; but why do you ask the question?”

“Is he an honest man?”

The tigrero looked at her.

“What do you mean by that?” he asked her.

“Why,” she said, with considerable embarrassment, “I mean a man of heart—a man, in short, whose word may be taken.”

Marianno became serious.

“Senorita,” he said, “Stronghand saved my life under circumstances when my only

hope was in Heaven ; I have seen this man perform deeds of incredible courage and audacity, for the sole object of serving people who frequently did not feel the slightest gratitude to him. To me he is more than a friend—more than a brother ; whatever he bade me I would do, even if I had to lay down the life he saved, and which belongs to him. Such, nina, is my opinion about the hunter called Stronghand.”

The young lady gave a glance of pleasure.

“ You are deeply attached to him ? ” she murmured.

“ As I told you, he is more to me than a brother.”

“ And you often see him ? ”

“ When I want him, or he wants me.”

“ Does he live in the neighbourhood, then ? ”

“ A short time back he stayed several days at the rancho.”

“ And will he return ? ”

“ Who knows ? ”

“ What did he during his stay here ? ”

“ I am not aware ; I believe that he hunted, though I did not see a single head of game he had killed whilst he was here.”

"Ah!" she said, pensively.

There was a silence: Marianno looked at her, somewhat surprised that she should have waked him for the sake of asking him such unimportant questions.

"Well," she continued presently, "if you wanted to see Stronghand, do you know where to find him?"

"I think so."

"You are not certain?"

"Forgive me, nina, I am certain; we have a spot where we are safe to meet."

"But he might not be there."

"That might happen."

"What would you do in that case?"

"Go and seek him at another place, where I should be sure of finding him."

"Ah! and where is that?"

"At the village he inhabits."

"What village is that? I know of none in the vicinity."

"Pardon me, nina; there is one."

"A long way from here, I presume?"

"Only a few leagues."

"And what is this pueblo?"

"A village of the Papazos."

"What?"

"Yes, I have forgotten to tell you that. Although he is a white man, Stronghand has, for reasons I am ignorant of, joined the Indians, and been adopted by one of their most powerful tribes."

"That is singular," the young lady murmured.

"Is it not?" the tigrero replied, understanding less than ever the object of the conversation.

The maiden shook her head coquettishly, and seemed to form a sudden resolution.

"Marianno," she said, "I asked you to do me a service."

"Yes, nina, and I answered that I was ready to do it."

"That is true; are you still of the same mind?"

"Why should I have altered it?"

"This is what I want of you."

"Speak."

"I wish to see Stronghand."

"Very good; when?"

"At once."

"What?" he asked, in amazement.

"Do you refuse?"

"I do not say that, but——"

"There is a but, then?"

"There always is one."

"Let me hear yours."

"It is long past midnight."

"What matter is that?"

"Not much, I allow."

"Well, what next?"

"It is a long journey."

"Our horses are good."

"We risk not finding the hunter at our usual meeting-place."

"We will push on to his village."

The tigrero looked at her attentively.

"You have a great need to see Strong-hand in that case?" he asked.

"Most extreme."

"It is more serious than you suppose, *senorita*."

"Why so?"

"Hang it! it is not so easy to enter an Indian village."

"But you do so."

"That is true; but I am alone and well known."

"Well, I will go on after you ; that is all."

"Are you aware that the Indians have revolted?"

"That does not concern you, as you are a friend of theirs."

Marianno shook his head.

"You ask a very difficult thing again, tocaya," he said, "in which you run a great risk."

"Yes, if I fail ; but I shall succeed."

"It would be better to give up this excursion."

"Confess at once," she said, impatiently, "that you do not wish to keep the promise you made me."

"You are unjust to me ; I am only trying to dissuade you from an enterprise which you will repent when it is too late."

"That is my business, I repeat, Marianno," she continued, with a marked stress in her words ; "it is not to gratify a caprice that I wish to see the hunter : I have reasons of the utmost importance for wishing to speak with him ; and, to tell you all, he urged me to summon him under certain

‘circumstances, and told me I need only apply to you in order to find him. Are you satisfied now? will you adhere to your doubts, and still refuse to accompany me?’”

The young man had listened to Donna Marianna with earnest attention; when she ended he replied—

“I no longer hesitate, nina; as things are so, I am bound to obey you. Still, I beg you not to make me responsible for any events that may happen.”

“Whatever may occur, my kind Marianno, be assured that I shall be grateful to you for the immense service you have rendered me.”

“And you wish to start at once?”

“How far have we to ride?”

“Some ten or twelve leagues.”

“Oh, that is nothing.”

“Not on a regular road; but I warn you that we shall be compelled to follow hardly visible wild beast tracks.”

“The night is clear; we shall have sufficient light to guide us, so let us start.”

“If you wish it,” the young man answered.

A few minutes later they left the rancho' at a gallop. It was about two in the morning; and the moon, which was at its full, lit up the landscape as in bright day.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE EXCURSION.

As we have already said, Donna Marianna, although still so young, was gifted with an ardent soul and an energetic character, which the unusual dangers of a border life had, so to speak, unconsciously ripened. In life these select organizations do not, know themselves; events alone, by exciting their living strength, reveal to them what they are capable of at a given moment, by urging them bravely to endure the attack of malignant fortune, and to contend resolutely with their adversary. When the Marquis, forced by the necessities of his unhappy condition, had a frank explanation with his children, and confessed to them into what difficulties he was suddenly thrown, Donna Marianna had listened to him with the

most sustained attention. Then, by degrees, a species of revolution took place in her. Stronghand's words reverted to her mind, and she had a vague idea that he could avert the danger that was suspended over her father's head.

On recapitulating all that had occurred to her since her departure from Rosario—the help the hunter had rendered her on various occasions with unexampled devotion—the conversation she had held with him a few days previously, and the promise she had made him—it appeared evident to her that Stronghand, better informed than perhaps the Marquis himself was about the machinations of his enemies, held in his hands the means of saving the Moguer family, and parrying the blows which were about to be dealt them in the dark.

Then, full of hope, and confiding in the promises of this man who had never made his appearance except to prove his devotion to her, her resolution was spontaneously formed, and without informing any one of the project she had conceived, for fear lest an effort might be made to dissuade her, she went to her nurse's rancho, in order to

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obtain an interview with the hunter by the agency of her foster-mother. Under existing circumstances, the step taken by Donna Marianna was not at all easy or without dangers. The daughter of the Marquis de Moguer galloping at night along the Indian border, only accompanied by one man—devoted, it is true, but who, in spite of all his courage, would be powerless to defend her against an attack—displayed more than temerity in this action; and however great her bravery was, and the confidence she had in the honesty of the enterprise she was thus blindly undertaking, still she could not refrain from an internal shudder on thinking of her isolated position, and the ease with which she might be surprised, carried off, or even massacred by the revolted Indians. Too proud, however, to allow any of the secret fears that agitated her to be seen, Donna Marianna affected a tranquillity and freedom of mind she was far from feeling. She conversed in a low voice with her foster-brother, teasing and scolding him about the difficulty he had made in granting her request, and describing her delight at a ride through

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such exquisite scenery on so magnificent a night.

Marianno did not think, and consequently did not understand what he supposed was a girl's fancy. Accustomed since childhood to yield to all the wishes of his foster-sister, and obey her as a slave, he had on this occasion done what she desired without trying to account for such an unusual excursion, so happy did he feel at obliging her. At the same time, he felt a lively pleasure at accompanying her, and thus passing a few hours in her company. We must not mistake the feelings that animated the tigrero for Donna Marianna. He loved his foster-sister with his whole soul, and would have gladly died for her; but this feeling, lively as it was, had nothing personal or interested about it; it was merely friendship, but a friendship elevated to the most complete self-denial and the most entire devotion—in a word, to the most sublime degree which this feeling can attain in the human heart. Hence the tigrero, comprehending the responsibility weighing on him, rode on, as is commonly said, with his beard on his shoulder, carefully examining the bushes,

listening to the desert sounds, and ready, on the slightest alarm, bravely to defend the girl who had placed herself under his guard. The country they were traversing, though rather varied, was not, however, completely wooded: owing to the transparent brightness of the night, the view extended for a great distance, which removed all fears of a surprise, and gave a certain security to the travellers; still, they at times fancied they saw great shadows moving on the river bank, and flying at their approach. The young lady looked round her curiously, and then asked the tigrero whether they would soon reach the spot where Stronghand was. Marianno pointed out to her a gentle eminence forming a bend of the river, on the top of which the fugitive gleams of an expiring fire could be seen at intervals.

"That is where we are going," he said.

"Then we have only a few minutes' ride, and it is useless to hurry our horses."

"You are mistaken, nina. Not only is the track we are following very winding, and will detain us, but, through an optical illusion easy to be understood, this hill which you fancy so near to us is at least two

leagues distant as the crow flies ; so that, taking into account the windings, the distance is nearly doubled."

"Can we not cut across country, and thus shorten the distance?"

"Heaven forbid, nina! We should get into trembling prairies, in which we should be swallowed up in a few minutes."

"I trust to you in that case, Marianno; besides, now that, thanks to that fire, I am certain of meeting the hunter, my anxiety is less lively, and I will await patiently."

"Permit me to remark, my dear tocaya, that I did not say certainly that we should find Stronghand at this bivouac."

"What did you tell me, then?"

"Simply that we might hope to meet him here, because it is the spot where he generally encamps when hunting in these parts."

"Still, as we can perceive the flame of that watch-fire—for that is really a flame, is it not?"

"Certainly; still, we have yet to learn whether this fire has been kindled by Stronghand or some other hunter. This mound is

one of the most suitable places of encampment, owing to the height of the hill, which allows the country to be surveyed, and thus avoid a surprise."

"Then probably we shall not find the hunter at the encampment?"

"I do not say that either, nina," Marianno answered, with a laugh.

"But what do you mean?" the young lady said, impatiently patting the pommel of her saddle with her little hand; "you are really unendurable."

"Do not be angry, tocaya; I may be mistaken. If Stronghand is not here, perhaps we may find a hunter who will tell us where he is."

"Why not an Indian?"

"Because there are no Indians at that camp fire."

"Tocayo, I must really ask this time how you can possibly know that?"

"Very easily, nina; I do not require to be a sorcerer to guess so simple a thing."

"Do you consider it so simple?"

"Certainly; nothing can be more so."

"In that case I will ask you to explain, for it is always worth while learning."

"You fancy you are joking, nina; and yet there is always something to be learned in the desert."

"Good, good, to-day; I know that; but I am waiting for your explanation."

"Listen then. This fire, as I told you, is not an Indian fire."

"That is not exactly what you said to me. Go on, however."

"The Indians, when they camp on the white man's border, never light a fire, for fear of revealing their presence; or if compelled to light one in order to cook their food, they are most careful to diminish the flame, in the first place by digging a deep hole in the ground, and next by only using extremely dry wood, which burns without crackling, flaming, or producing smoke, and which they carry with them for long distances, in case they might not find it on their road."

"But, my friend, that fire is scarce visible."

"That is true; but still it is sufficiently so for us to have perceived it a long distance off, and thus discovered the existence of a bivouac at this spot which, under present

circumstances, would entail the surprise and consequent death of the imprudent men who lit it, if they were Indians instead of hunters."

"Excellently reasoned, companero, and like a man accustomed to a desert life!" a rough, though good-humoured voice suddenly said, a few yards from them.

The travellers started and pulled up sharply, while anxiously investigating the surrounding thickets. Marianno, however, did not lose his head under these critical circumstances; but with a movement swift as thought raised his rifle, and covered a man who was standing by the side of a thicket, with his hands crossed on the muzzle of a long gun.

"Hold, compadre!" the stranger continued, not at all disturbed by the tigrero's hostile demonstration; pay attention to what you are about. A thousand fiends! do you know that you run a risk of killing a friend?"

Marianno hesitated for a moment; and then, without raising his rifle, remarked—

"I fancy I recognise that voice."

"By Jove!" the other said, "it would be a fine joke if you did not."

"Wait a minute; are you not Whistler?"

"All right, you remember now," the Canadian said with a laugh; for the person was really the hunter whom the reader saw for a moment at the village of the Papazos.

The tigrero uncocked his rifle, which he threw over his shoulder, and said to Marianna—

"It is a friend."

"Are you quite sure of this man?" she asked in a low, quick voice.

"As of myself."

"Who is he?"

"A Canadian hunter or trapper. He has all the defects of the race, but at the same time all its qualities."

"I will believe you, for his countrymen are generally regarded as honest men. Ask him what he was doing on the skirt of the track."

Marianno obeyed.

"I was attending to my business," Whistler replied with a grin; "and pray what may you be doing, so poorly accompanied at this hour of the night, when the Indians have taken the field?"

"I am travelling, as you see."

"Yes, but every journey has an object, I suppose."

"It has."

"Well, I do not see what end yours can achieve by continuing in that direction."

"Still, we are going to do so till we have found the man we are in search of."

"I will not ask you any questions, although I may perhaps have a right to do so; still I fancy you would act more wisely in turning back than in obstinately going on."

"I am not able to do so."

"Why not?"

"Because I have not the command of the expedition, and I cannot undertake such a responsibility."

"Ah, who is the chief, then? I only see two persons."

"You seem to forget, senor," Donna Marianna said, joining in the conversation for the first time, "that one of these two persons is a female."

"Of course she must command," the trapper answered, with a courteous bow; "pray excuse me, madam."

"I the more willingly do so, because I hope to obtain from you important information about the object of the journey we have undertaken, perhaps somewhat too carelessly, in these desolate regions."

"I shall be too happy to be agreeable to you, my lady, if it be in my power."

"Permit me, in that case, to ask you a few questions."

"Pray do so."

"I wish to know what the camp is whose watch-fires I perceive a short distance off."

"A hunter's bivouac."

"Only hunters?"

"Yes, they are all white hunters or trappers."

"I thank you, senior. Do you know these men?"

"Very well, considering I am a member of the band."

Donna Marianna hesitated for a moment.

"Forgive me, sir," she continued, "I am in search of a hunter with whom grave reasons force me to desire an immediate interview; perhaps he is among your comrades."

"Do you know him personally, madam?"

"Yes, and am under great obligations to him. He is called Stronghand."

The trapper eagerly walked up to the young lady, and attentively examined her.

"You wish to have an immediate interview with Stronghand?"

"Yes, I repeat, senor, for reasons of the highest importance."

"In that case you are Donna Marianna de Moguer."

"What!" she exclaimed, in surprise, "you know my name?"

"That needs not astonish you, madam," he said, with the most exquisite politeness; "I am the intimate friend of Stronghand. Without entering into any details that might justly offend you, my friend told me that you might perchance come and ask for him at our camp fire."

"He knew it, then," she murmured, in a trembling voice; "but how did he learn it?"

Though these words were uttered in a whisper, Whistler heard them.

"He doubtless hoped it would be so,

without daring to credit it, madam," he answered.

"Good heavens!" she continued, "what does this mean?"

"That my friend, in his eager desire to be agreeable to you, and foreseeing the chance of your coming during his absence, warned me, in order to spare you a very difficult search, and thus induce you to grant me a little of that confidence you deign to honour him with."

"I thank you, sir. Now that you know me, would it be taxing your courtesy too greatly to ask you to guide my companion and myself to your bivouac?"

"I am at your orders, madam, and believe me that you will receive a proper reception, even though my friend does not happen to be there at the moment."

"What!" she said, suddenly checking her horse, "can he be absent?"

"Yes, but do not let that cause you any anxiety; he will soon return."

"Good heavens!" she murmured, clasping her hands in grief.

"Madam," Whistler again continued, "I understand that the reasons which urged

you to undertake such a journey must be of the utmost importance ; let me, therefore, go on ahead to the camp, and make all the preparations for your reception."

"But Stronghand, senor?"

"Warned through me, madam, he will be back by daybreak."

"You promise me that, senor?"

"On my honour."

"Go, then, and may Heaven requite you for the good-will and courtesy you show me."

Whistler bowed respectfully to the young lady, took his rifle under his arm, and soon disappeared in the forest.

"We can now go on without fear," said Marianno ; "I know Whistler to be an honest, worthy fellow, and he will do what he has promised."

"Heaven grant I may see the man whom I have come so far to meet."

"You will see him, be assured ; moreover, all precautions were taken in the event of your visit."

"Yes," she murmured, pausing ; "and it is this which renders me alarmed. Well, I put my trust in the Virgin."

And flogging her horse, she went on her way, followed by the tigrero, who, according to his habit, could not at all comprehend this remark, after the desire the young lady had avinced to see the hunter.

CHAPTER IX.

THE HUNTER'S CAMP.

It was no great distance to the bivouac, and the travellers reached it about half an hour after Whistler. Still, though this period was so short, the worthy Canadian had profited by it to erect for the young lady, who thanked him by a smile, a jacal of branches, under which she found a shelter as comfortable as desert life permits. The hunters' camp had a military look, which greatly perplexed Donna Marianna. Strong wooden palisades defended all the approaches; the horses, which were ready saddled, were fastened to piquets; several watch-fires, lighted at regular distances, sufficiently illumined the plain to prevent the approach of any enemy, whether man or beast; and four sentinels, standing rifle in hand on the

entrenchments, followed with a vigilant eye the slightest undulations of the lofty pass. Some thirty men, with harsh and irregular features, clothed after the fashion of wood-rangers, in fur caps, cotton shirts, and leather calzoneras, were lying in front of the fires, rifle in hand, in order to be ready for the first alarm.

Orders had probably been given beforehand by Whistler, for the sentinels allowed the two travellers to pass unquestioned through a breach in the entrenchments, which was immediately closed after them again. The Canadian was awaiting them in front of the jacal; he helped Donna Marianna to dismount, and the horses were led to join the others, and supplied with a copious meal of alfalfa.

"You are welcome among us, senora," he said, with a respectful bow; "in this jacal, which no one will enter save yourself, there is a bed of skins, on which you can take a few hours' rest while awaiting Stronghand's arrival."

"I thank you, senor, for this graceful attention, by which I cannot profit, however, till you have reiterated your promise."

"Senorita, two horsemen have already set out to fetch Stronghand, but I repeat, that he cannot be here for some hours; now, if you will accept the humble refreshment prepared for you——"

"I only require rest, senor; still I am not the less obliged to you for your offer. With your permission, I will retire."

"You are the mistress here, madam."

The young lady smiled, pressed her foster-brother's hand, and entered the jacal. So soon as Donna Marianna had let fall after her the blanket which formed the doorway, the tigrero quietly removed his zarape from his shoulders, and laid it on the ground.

"What is that for, comrade?" Whistler asked, astonished at the performance.

"You see, compadre, I am making my bed."

"Do you mean to sleep there?"

"Why not?"

"As you please; still, you will be cold, that is all."

"Nonsense! a night is soon spent, especially when so far advanced as this one is."

"I trust that you do not doubt us."

"No, Whistler, no; but Donna Marianna

is my foster-sister, and I am bound to watch over her."

"That care concerns me at the moment; so do not be at all alarmed."

"Two sentries are better than one; besides, you know me, do you not? Although I place the utmost confidence in you, I will not surrender the guardianship of my *tocaya* to another man; that is my idea, whether right or wrong, and I shall not give it up."

"As you please," the trapper said, with a laugh.

And he left him at liberty to make his arrangements as he pleased. The *tigrero*, though he knew most of the hunters, or, perhaps, because he knew them, did not wish to leave his foster-sister unprotected among these reckless men, who, accustomed to the utter licence of a desert life, might, under the influence of strong liquors, forget the sacred duties of hospitality, and insult Donna Marianna. In this the young man, in spite of his desert experience, was completely mistaken.

We have no intention to attempt the rehabilitation of these men, who, generally

endowed with evil instincts, and who do not wish to yield to the demands of civilization, retire into the desert in order to live as they like, and seek liberty in licence; still, we will mention in their honour, that a nomadic life, after a certain lapse of time, completely modifies their character, curbs their passions, and so subjects them that they gradually become purified by constant danger and privations, by getting rid of all that was bad in them, and retaining beneath their rough bark and coarse manners principles of honesty and devotion of which they would have been considered incapable at an earlier period. What we say here is scrupulously true of about two-thirds at least of the bold pioneers who traverse in all directions the vast savannahs of the New World; the others are incorrigible, and within a given time end by becoming real bandits, and carry their contingent of crime to those formidable bands of pirates of the prairies, who ambush like hideous birds of prey to await the passage of caravans, and plunder and massacre the travellers.

But, whether good or bad, the dwellers

on the prairie—no matter if whites, half-breeds, or red-skins, trappers, pirates, or Indians—have one virtue in common, and whose duties they carry out with remarkable punctuality and generosity, and that is hospitality. A traveller surprised by night, and wearied by a long journey, may, if he see a camp-fire in the huts of an Indian village, present himself without fear, and claim hospitality. From that moment he is sacred to the men he applies to, no matter if they be Indians, bravos, hunters, or even pirates. These individuals, who would not have scrupled to assassinate him by the side of a ditch, treat him like a brother, show him the most delicate attentions, and will never make any insulting allusions to the length of his stay among them; on the contrary, he is at liberty to remain as long as he pleases, and when he takes leave his hosts say good-bye regretfully. At the same time it is true that, if they meet him a week after in the forest, they will kill him without mercy to raise his hair and take his weapons; but this need only be apprehended with the pirates and some Indian tribes of the far west. As

for the hunters, when a stranger has once slept by their side and shared their food, he is for ever sacred to them.

The tigrero, therefore, was completely mistaken, when he feared lest Donna Marianna might be insulted by these men, who, although coarse, were honest and loyal in the main; and who, flattered by the confidence this lovely, innocent girl placed in them, would, on the contrary, have gladly defended her had it been necessary.

Whistler went off with a laugh, and lay down by the side of his comrades. As we have already said, the night was far advanced when Donna Marianna and her travelling companion reached the camp of the hunters; a few hours at the most separated them from sunrise; and the young lady, who at first resolved to spend these hours awake, overcome by fatigue, had yielded to sleep, and enjoyed a calm and refreshing rest. So soon as day began to appear, Donna Marianna repaired as well as she could the disorder produced in her dress by her lengthened journey, rose and went to the door of the jacal. The camp was still plunged in the deepest silence: with

the exceptions of the sentries still on the watch, the hunters were fast asleep.

The dawn was just breaking, and striping the horizon with wide vermilion bands; the sharp and rather cold morning breeze rustled softly through the branches; the flowers that enamelled the prairie raised themselves, and expanded their corollas to receive the first sunbeams; the numberless streams, whose silvery waters made their way through the tall grass, murmured over the white and grey pebbles as they bore their tribute to the Rio Bravo del Norte, whose capricious windings could be guessed in the distance, owing to the thick cloud of vapour that constantly rose from it and brooded over its bed. The birds, still hidden beneath the foliage, were timidly preluding their harmonious concert; the glad earth, the bright sky, the serene atmosphere, the pure light—all, in a word, revealed that the day which had now entirely appeared was about to be tranquil and lovely.

The maiden, refreshed by the rest she had enjoyed, felt herself new-born as she breathed the first exhalations of the flowers

and the sharp odour which is found in the desert alone. Without venturing to quit the jacal, in front of which the tigrero was lying, she surveyed the surrounding landscape, which, thanks to the elevation she stood at, lay expanded at her feet for a long distance. The profound calmness of re-awakening nature, the powerful harmonies of the desert, filled the maiden's heart with a gentle melancholy; she pensively indulged in those thoughts which the great spectacles of nature ever arouse in minds unaffected by human passions. In the meanwhile the sun ascended the horizon, and the last shadows melted away in the dazzling beams propelled by the day-star. Suddenly the girl uttered an exclamation of delight, for she noticed a band of horsemen fording the stream, and apparently coming in the direction of the hill. At the cry his foster-sister uttered, the tigrero bounded to his feet and stood by her side, rifle in hand, ready to defend her if necessary.

"Good morning, todayo," she said to him.

"Heaven keep you, nina!" he replied, with a shade of anxiety. "Have you slept well?"

"I could not have done so better, Marianno."

"All right then; but why did you utter that cry?"

"I cried out, my friend, and scarce know why."

"Ah, yes—stay; look at those horsemen coming up at full speed."

"Carai! how they gallop! They will be here within half an hour."

"Do you think that Stronghand is among them?"

"I suppose so, nina."

"And I am sure of it," said Whistler, with a respectful bow to the young lady; "I have recognised him, senorita; so will you allow that I have kept my promise?"

"Most fully, senor; and I know not how to express my thanks for the hearty hospitality you have given me."

"I have no claim to any thanks from you, senorita, as I have only carried out my friend's intention; nina, it is to him alone you should offer thanks, if you consider that you ought to make them."

In the meanwhile the camp was aroused; the hunters were yawning, and turned to

their daily avocations ; some led their horses to the watering-place, others kindled the fires ; some cut the wood requisite to keep them up, while two or three of the older men acted as cooks, and got breakfast ready for the party. The camp changed its appearance in a minute ; it lived the nervous, agitated life of the desert, in which each man performs his task with the feverish speed of persons who are aware of the value of time, and do not wish to lose it. The young lady, at first surprised by the cries, laughter, and unaccustomed movement that prevailed around her, began to grow used to it, and eagerly watched the occupations of the men she had beneath her eyes. A sharp challenge of " Who goes there ? " suddenly made her raise her head.

" A friend ! " a voice she at once recognised answered from without.

Suddenly a band of horsemen entered the camp, at their head being Stronghand. The young man dismounted, and after exchanging a few words with Whistler, he went straight up to the maiden, who was standing motionless in the doorway of the jacal, and watching his approach with

amazement. In fact, as we have said, Stronghand was not alone; several persons accompanied him, among them being Thunderbolt and Donna Esperanza; the rest were confidential Indian servants. When Stronghand came in front of the young lady, he bowed to her respectfully, and then turned to the persons who accompanied him.

"Permit me, *senorita*," he said to her, "to present to you my mother, Donna Esperanza, and my father; both love you, though they do not know you, and insisted on accompanying me."

The maiden, blushing with joy at this delicate attention on the part of the hunter, who thus placed their interview beneath the safeguard of his father and mother, replied with emotion—

"I am delighted, *senor*, with this kind inspiration of your heart; it augments, were it possible, the confidence I have placed in you, and the gratitude I felt for the eminent services you have rendered me."

Donna Esperanza and the sachem embraced the girl, who, at once ashamed and joyous at the friendship of these persons, whose exterior was at once so imposing and

so venerable, knew not how to respond to their caresses and the kindness they evinced to her. In the meanwhile the hunters had raised, with great skill and speed, a tent, under which the four persons were at once protected from the curious glances of the persons who surrounded them. Through that innate feeling of women, which makes them love or detest each other at the first glance, Donna Esperanza and the young lady at once felt attracted to each other by a natural movement of sympathy, and leaving the gentlemen to their occupations, they withdrew on one side, and began an animated and friendly conversation. Donna Marianna, subjugated by Donna Esperanza's seductive manner, and drawn toward her by a feeling of attraction for which she did not attempt to account, as she felt so happy with her, spoke to her open-heartedly; but then she was greatly surprised to see that this lady, whom she was bound to suppose an entire stranger, was perfectly acquainted with all that related to her family, and knew her father's affairs better than she did herself; her amazement increased when Donna Esperanza explained in the fullest details

the reasons that occasioned her presence in the hunter's camp, and the precarious position to which the Marquis de Moguer was reduced.

"I could add many more surprising things, my dear girl," Donna Esperanza continued with a smile, "but I do not wish to fatigue you at present; sufficient for you to know that we really take an interest in your family, and that it will not be our fault if your father is not soon freed from all his cares."

"Oh, how good you are, madam!" the young lady exclaimed, warmly; "how can I have merited such lively interest on your part?"

"That must not trouble you at all, my dear girl; the step you have taken to-day to come to your father's assistance, and the confidence you have placed in my son, are for us proofs of the loftiness of your feelings and the purity of your heart. Although we are almost Indians," she added with a smile, "we have white blood enough in our veins to remember what we owe to persons of that race."

The conversation went on thus between

the two ladies on a footing of frank friendliness, until the moment when Stronghand came to interrupt it, by stating that breakfast was ready, and that they were only waiting for them to sit down. The tigrero and the Canadian had both been invited to share the meal, but they declined the invitation under the pretext that they did not like to eat with persons so high above them in rank, but in reality, because the worthy wood-rangers preferred breakfasting without ceremony. Stronghand did not press them, and allowed them to do as they pleased. Donna Marianna bit her lips in order to suppress a smile when the hunter informed her that they were about to sit down to table; for, owing to her recent journey and her life on the Indian border, the young lady was well aware that such meals were extremely simple, and eaten on the grass. Hence her surprise was at its height when, after passing into a separate compartment of the tent, she perceived a table laid with a luxury which would have been justly admired even in Mexico: nothing was wanting, even to massive plate and valuable crystal. The dishes, it is true, were simple,

and merely consisted of venison and fruit ; but all had a stamp of true grandeur, which it was impossible not to appreciate at the first glance. The contrast offered by this table, so elegantly and comfortably laid, was the greater, because, behind the canvas of the tent, desert life could be seen in all its simplicity.

The young lady seated herself between Thunderbolt and Donna Esperanza, Stronghand sat down opposite to her, and two men-servants waited. In spite of the agreeable surprise which the impromptu comfort of this repast, prepared for her alone, caused her, the young lady did not at all display her surprise, but she ate heartily and gaily, thus thanking her hosts for the delicate attentions they showed her. When the dainties were placed on the table, and the meal was drawing to a close, Stronghand bowed to Donna Marianna.

“Senorita,” he said, with a smile, “before we begin a serious conversation, which might, at this moment, appear to you untimely, be kind enough to permit my mother to tell us one of the charming Indian legends with which she generally enlivens the close of our meals.”

Donna Marianna was at first surprised by this proposition, made, without any apparent motive, at the close of a lively conversation ; but imagining that the hunter's remarks concealed a serious purpose, and that the legend, under its frivolous aspect, would entail valuable results for her, she answered, with her sweetest smile,—

“ I shall listen with the greatest pleasure to the narrative the senora is about to tell us, because my nurse, who is of Indian origin, was wont to lull me to sleep with these legends, which have left a deep and most agreeable impression on my mind.”

CHAPTER X.

THE LEGEND.

DONNA ESPERANZA exchanged a look with the sachem, and after reflecting a moment, as if recalling her ideas, she said to Donna Marianna, in her gentle, sympathizing voice,—

“My dear girl, before beginning my narrative, I must inform you that I belong to the Aztec race, and am descended in a direct line from the kings of that people. Hence, the story you are about to hear, though simple in its form, is completely exact, and has dwelt among us intact for generations. I trust,” she added, with a stress, “that it will interest you.”

Then turning to one of the criados who stood motionless behind the guests, she said,—

“The quipos.”

The criado went out, and almost immediately returned with a bag of perfumed tapir skin, which he handed his mistress with a bow. The latter opened it, and drew out several cords plaited of different coloured threads, divided at regular distances by knots mingled with shells and beads. These cords are called quipos, and are employed by the Indians to keep up the memory of events that have occurred during a long course of years, and thus represent books. Still, it requires a special study to understand these quipos, and few people are capable of deciphering them, the more so as the Indians, who are very jealous about keeping their historical secrets, only permit a small number of adepts to learn the explanation, which renders any knowledge of Indian history almost impossible for white men. Donna Esperanza, after attentively examining the quipos, selected one, replaced the others in the bag, and letting the knots of the rope glide through her fingers, much as a monk does with his beads when telling his rosary, she began her narrative.

For fear of injuring this story, whose truth

cannot be doubted, and which we ourselves heard told in an atepetl of the Papazos, we will leave it all its native rudeness, without attempting to adorn it with flowers of European metaphors, which, in our opinion, would deprive it of its peculiar character. Donna Esperanza spoke as follows:—

“At a certain period of the year,” she said, while beginning to feel the quipos, which served her, as it were, as a book, “long before the appearance of white men on the red territory, a numerous band of Chichimeques and Tolteques, who originally dwelt at the lakes, becoming dissatisfied, resolved to emigrate to the south-west in pursuit of the buffaloes, and carried out their resolve.

“At Salt Lake they divided, and those who remained continued to bear their primitive name; while the others, for an unknown motive, assumed that of Comanches. These Comanches, more enterprising than their brothers, continued their journey till they reached the banks of the Rio Gila, where they encamped and divided again. One band, which resolved not to go further, was

christened by the others, who determined to press on, the "Great Ears;" but the whites who first discovered them called them "Opatas." The remainder of the band continued to march in the same direction, and found the Rio Bravo del Norte at the mouth of the Rio Puerco. They had only two principal chiefs left, and gave themselves the name of Neu-ta-che, which means, "Those who reach the river's mouth." One of the chiefs had an only son, and the other a lovely daughter, and the young people loved each other. But this raised the anger of the father of the unhappy girl to such a height, that he made his band arm and prepare to fight. But the father and the young man crossed the Rio Gila, and buried themselves with their band in the territory afterwards called by the white man Senora or Sonora, where they settled and continued to reside peacefully until the period when the whites, ever in search of new lands, arrived there in their turn, and after many cruel wars, succeeded in gaining possession of the country.

"The Comanches had founded several towns in Sonora, and, in accordance with

their constant habit, in the neighbourhood of the gold and silver mines they discovered, and begun to work. One of their towns, perhaps the richest and most populous, had for its chief a warrior justly renowned for his wisdom in council and valour in the combat. This chief was called Quetzal-malin—that is to say, the “Twisted Feather.” His nobility was great and very ancient; he justly declared that he was descended in a direct line from Acamapichtzin, first king of Mexico, whose hieroglyphic he retained on the totem of his tribe, through that veneration which our fathers displayed for their ancestors. This hieroglyphic, which his descendants have preciously retained, is composed of a hand grasping a number of reeds, which is the literal translation of the name of the noble chief of the race. Twisted Feather had a daughter, eighteen summers old, lovely and graceful; her name was Ova, and she ran over the prairie grass without bending it; gentle, pensive, and timid as the virgin of the first loves, her black eyes had not yet been fixed on one of the warriors of the tribe, who all sought to please her.

“Ova wore a tunic of water-green colour, fastened round her waist by a wampum belt, with a large golden buckle. When she danced before her father, the old man’s forehead became unwrinkled, and a sunbeam passed into his eyes. Her father had often told her that it was time for her to marry; but Ova shook her head with a smile; she was happy, and the little bird that speaks to the heart of maidens had not yet sung to her the gentle strains of love.

“Still a moment arrived when Ova lost all her careless gaiety. The young girl, so laughing and so wild, became suddenly pensive and dreamy: she loved.

“Ova went to find her father; the chief at this moment was presiding over the great council of the nation in the great medicine calli. The maiden advanced, and knelt respectfully before her father.

“‘What is it, my daughter?’ the chief said, as he passed his hand gently through her long hair, which was fine as aloe threads.

“‘My father,’ she replied, looking down modestly, ‘I love and am beloved.’

“‘My daughter, what is the name of the

chief who is so happy that your choice should have fallen on him?’

“‘He is not a chief, my father; he is, perchance, one of the most obscure warriors of the tribe, although he is one of the bravest; he works in the gold mine that belongs to you.’

“The chief frowned, and a flash of anger sparkled in his glance.

“‘My father,’ the maiden continued, as she embraced his legs, ‘if I did not marry him, I should die.’

“The chief gazed at his daughter for a moment, and saw her so sad and resigned, that pity entered his heart. He, too, loved his daughter—his only child; for the Master of life had called away the others to the happy hunting-grounds. The aged man did not wish his daughter to die.

“‘You shall marry the man you love,’ he said to her.

“‘Do you promise it to me on the sacred totem of the nation, father?’

“‘On the sacred totem of the nation I promise it; speak, therefore, without fear. What is the name of the man you love?’

“‘He is called the Clouded Snake, father.’

"The old man sighed.

"'He is very poor,' he muttered.

"'I am rich enough for both.'

"'Be it so. You shall marry him, my daughter.'

"Ova rose, sparkling with joy and happiness, bowed to the assembly, and left the medicine lodge.

"Clouded Snake was poor, it is true—even very poor, since he was constrained to work in the gold mine; but he was young, he was brave, and was considered the handsomest of all the warriors of his age.

"Tall, robust, and muscular, Clouded Snake formed as complete a contrast with Ova, who was pale and frail, as a noble buffalo does with a graceful antelope. Perhaps their love emanated from this contrast.

"The young man, though he was so poor, found means to give his betrothed perfumes of grizzly bears' grease, necklaces of alligators' teeth, and wampum girdles.

"The young people were happy. On the eve of the marriage, Clouded Snake laid at Ova's feet buckles of gold and two bracelets of shells, mingled with beads of pure gold.

"Ova accepted these presents with a

smile, and said to her betrothed, as she left him—

“‘Farewell; we part to-day to see each other to-morrow, and to-morrow we shall be united for ever.’

“On the next day Clouded Snake did not come. Ova waited for several months; Clouded Snake did not reappear.

“In vain, by the chief’s orders, was the young man sought for throughout the entire country; no one had seen him, no one had heard speak of him.

“Clouded Snake no longer existed, except in the heart of Ova.

“She wept for him, and people tried to make her believe that he had gone to fight the white men; but Ova shook her head and wiped away her tears.

“Forty times did the snow cover the summit of the mountains, and yet it had been impossible to clear up the mystery of Clouded Snake’s disappearance.

“One day some labourers at work in the gold mine, which had belonged to Ova’s father, and was now her property, while going far down an old gallery which had been abandoned for a long time, exhumed

a corpse as miraculously preserved as the mummies of the *teocallis* are in their bandages.

"The warriors flocked up to see this strange corpse, clothed in a dress belonging to another age, and no one recognised it.

"Ova, who was then old, and who, to please her father, had married the great chief of his nation when her last hope expired, went with her husband to the spot where the corpse was exposed to the sight of visitors.

"Suddenly she started, and tears darted from her eyes; she had recognised Clouded Snake, as handsome as on the day when she left him with the hope of a speedy reunion. She, on the other hand, aged, and bowed down more by grief than years, was weak and tottering.

"Ova wished that the corpse of the man whom she had been on the point of marrying, and whom the evil spirit had torn from her, should be restored to the mine from which it had been removed after forty years. The mine, by the orders of the chief's wife, although extremely rich, was abandoned and shut up.

"Ova ordered a hieroglyphic to be carved on the stone that covers the body of her betrothed, which may be thus translated:— 'This sepulchre is without a body; this body is without a sepulchre; but by itself it is a sepulchre and a body.'

"Such," Donna Esperanza added, as she finished the legend, and laid down the quipus, "is the story of the lovely Ova, daughter of the great chief Twisted Feather, and of Clouded Snake the miner, just as it occurred, and just as Ova herself ordered it to be preserved by a special quipus for future ages."

Donna Esperanza stopped, and there was a moment's silence.

"Well, senorita," the sachem asked, "has the legend interested you?"

"Through its simplicity it is most touching, senor," the young lady answered; "still, there is something vague and unsettled about the whole story, which impairs its effect."

Thunderbolt smiled gently.

"You find, do you not, that we are not told the precise spot where the events of the narrative occurred, that Senora is very large,

and that the town in which Twisted Feather commanded is not sufficiently indicated?"

"Pardon me, senor," the young lady remarked, with a blush, "such geographical notions, though doubtless very useful in settling the spot where events have occurred, interest me personally very slightly. What I find incomplete is the story itself; the rest does not concern me."

"More so than you suppose, perhaps, *senorita*," the sachem remarked; "but pray be good enough to state your objections more fully."

"Excuse me, senor, but I have not yet recovered from the surprise which the events that have occurred during the last few hours have occasioned me, and I explain myself badly, in spite of my efforts."

"What do you mean, *senorita*, and to what events are you referring?"

"To those which are taking place at this very moment. Having started from home to ask an interview of a wood-ranger, whom I naturally supposed encamped in the open air, and shared the life of privations of his fellows, I meet, on the contrary, persons who overwhelm me with attentions, and, under

an Indian appearance, conceal all the refinements of the most advanced civilization. You can understand how this strange contrast with what surrounds me must surprise, almost frighten me, who am a young girl, ignorant of the world, and have undertaken a step which many persons would disapprove if they knew it."

"You are going too far, my dear child," Donna Esperanza replied, as she tenderly embraced her; "what you have seen here ought not to surprise you. My husband is one of the principal chiefs of the great Confederation of the Papazos; but he and I, in other times, lived the life of white men. When we withdrew to the desert, we took with us our civilized habits, and that is the entire mystery. As for the step you have taken, it has nothing that is not most honourable to you."

"I thank you for these kind remarks, and the interpretation you are pleased to give to a step conceived, perhaps, a little too giddily, and executed more giddily still."

"Do not regret it, senorita," said Thunderbolt; "perhaps it has helped your father's affairs more than you suppose."

"As for the story of Ova," Donna Esperanza continued, with a gentle smile, "this is how it ended:—the poor woman died of despair a few days after the discovery of the man she ought to have married, and whom she had held in such tender memory for so long a time. At her last hour she expressed a desire to be united in death to the man from whom she had been separated in life. This last wish was carried out. The two betrothed repose side by side in the mine, which was at once closed again, and no one has dreamed of opening it up to the present day."

"I thank you, senora, for completing your narrative. Still," Marianna said, with a sigh, "this gold mine must, in my opinion, be very poor, since the Spaniards, when they seized the country, did not attempt to work it."

"Not at all, my dear child; on the contrary, it is excessively rich. But Ova's secret has been so well kept that the Spaniards remained in ignorance of its existence."

The two ladies were by this time alone, as the sachem and his son had left the tent.

"It is strange," the maiden murmured, answering her own thoughts rather than Donna Esperanza's remark.

The earnestness with which the lady insisted on referring to the legend astounded and interested her. A secret foreboding warned her that the story had a hidden object, whose importance still escaped her, though she was burning to discover it. Donna Esperanza attentively followed in her face the various feelings that agitated her, and were reflected in her expressive face as in a mirror. She continued—

"This is why the mine was not discovered when the Spaniards seized the town where it was situated. It had been stopped up for a very long time. The old inhabitants were killed or expelled by the conquerors; and those who escaped were careful not to reveal this secret to their oppressors. The latter destroyed the town, and built an immense hacienda over its mines."

"But—pardon me for questioning you thus, senora—how have all these facts come to your knowledge?"

"For a very simple reason, my dear

child. Ova was my ancestress, and the knowledge of this mine is consequently a family secret for us. I am, perhaps, the only person in the world who at the present day knows its exact position."

"Yes, I understand you," the young lady said, becoming very pensive.

"Still you are trying to discover, are you not, my dear child?" the old lady continued, kindly interrogating her, "why, instead of letting you speak of the important matters that brought you here, my son urged you to ask this story of me; and why, without pity for your filial sorrow, I consented to do so; and why, now that it is ended, I am anxious for you to learn the minutest details."

The girl hid her face in the old lady's bosom, and burst into tears.

"Yes," she said, "you have understood me, madam, and pray pardon me."

"Pardon you for what, my dear child? for loving your father? On the contrary, you are quite right. But yours is no common nature, my child; though we have only been acquainted for a few hours, you

have sufficiently appreciated my character, I think, to recognise the interest I take in you."

"Yes, yes, I believe you, madam; I must believe you."

"Well, console yourself, my dear girl; do not weep thus, or I shall be forced to follow your example; and I have still some details to add to this interminable story."

The maiden smiled through her tears. "Oh, you are so kind, madam," she answered.

"No, I love you, that is all, and," she added, with a sigh, "I have done so for a long time."

Donna Marianna gazed at her with amazement.

"Yes, that surprises you," she continued, "and I can well understand it. But enough of this subject for the present, my darling, and let us return to what I wanted to say to you."

"Oh, I am listening to you, madam."

"I will now tell you where Ova's town stood, and its name. It was called Cibola."

"Cibola!" the girl exclaimed.

"Yes, dear child, the very spot where the

Hacienda del Toro was afterwards built by your ancestor, the Marquis de Moguer. Now do you understand me?"

Without replying, Donna Marianna threw herself into the old lady's arms, who pressed her tenderly to her bosom.

CHAPTER XI.

KIDD REAPPEARS.

KIDD had left the atepetl of the Papazos with rage in his heart, and revolved in his mind the most terrible schemes of vengeance. Not that the bandit had in his gangrened heart any sensitive chord which noble sentiment could cause to vibrate; to him it was a matter of the slightest importance that he had been publicly branded and expelled like the lowest scoundrel; humiliation glided over him without affecting him, and what most enraged him was to see the fortune dried up which Don Marcos de Nija had momentarily flashed before his greedy eyes, and which he hoped, by dissimulation and treachery, to invest in his capacious pocket in the shape of gold ounces. Now he could not longer dream of it; the slightest infor-

mation he could henceforth accidentally pick up would not be sufficiently important to be paid for at the price given for the first.

There was something desperate in such an alternative for a man like the bandit; but what should he do? With all his other qualities, the adventurer combined the rather strange one, for him, of only being brave like the Coyotes, which only attack in pairs, and when they are certain of conquering; that is to say, he was an utter coward when compelled to meet an enemy face to face, although he would not hesitate to kill him from behind a bush. The adventurer did not deceive himself about this peculiarity of his character, and the mere idea of picking a quarrel with Stronghand caused him an instinctive terror, externally revealed by a general trembling.

He therefore very sadly and despairingly proceeded along the road to the Real de Minas, not knowing yet whether he should enter the pueblo, or push further on and seek fortune elsewhere, when his attention was attracted to the left hand of the road he was following by an unusual and continuous

undulation of the tall grass. The bandit's first impulse was to stop, dismount, and conceal himself and his horse behind an aloe tree, which afforded a temporary shelter. It is extraordinary to see how villains, who care nothing for the life of others, display remarkable instinct of self-preservation, and what tricks they employ to escape an often imaginary danger. When the bandit believed himself in safety, at least for the moment, he began watching most carefully the undulation of the grass, which incessantly drew nearer to him.

A quarter of an hour passed thus; then the grass parted, and the bandit perceived three horsemen coming towards him, entirely dressed in black. With that peculiar scent scoundrels have for detecting policemen, Kidd did not deceive himself; he at once recognised the three persons as belonging to the noble corporation of Alguazils. A fourth, also dressed in black, in whose ugly features an expression of bestial craft and wickedness seemed to be reflected, was evidently the leader of the party,—an Alguazil mayor, a race of rapacious vultures, without heart or entrails; a manso Indian, dressed

in torn trousers, and with bare head, arms, and legs, was running in front of the others, and evidently acting as guide.

“Hold, José!” the most important of the men shouted to the Indian, employing the general nickname of these poor fellows. “Hold, José! mind you do not lead us astray, scoundrel, if you do not want to have your ribs broken; we must arrive this night at the Real de Minas of Quitovar, whither important business summons us.”

“You would arrive there before two o’clock, Excellency,” the Indian answered, with a crafty laugh, “if instead of riding at a foot pace you would consent to give your mule the spurs; if not, we shall not get there till after sunset.”

“*Vulga mi Dios!*” the first speaker said, angrily; “what will my honourable client, El Senor Senator Don Rufino Contreras say, who must have been awaiting my arrival for several days with the utmost impatience?”

“Nonsense, Excellency! you will arrive soon enough to torture honest people.”

“What do you dare to say, scoundrel?”

the bailiff exclaimed, raising the chicote he held in his hand.

The Indian parried with a stick the blow which would have otherwise fallen on his loins, and answered drily, as he seized the mule by the bridle, and made it rear, to the great alarm of its rider,—

“Take care, senor; though you call me José, and treat me no better nor worse than a brute, we are no longer in one of your civilized towns, but on the prairie; here I have my foot on my native heath, and will not put up with the slightest insult from you. Treat me as an idiot, if you like, and I shall not care for it, as it comes from one whom I utterly despise; but bear this in mind,—on the slightest threatening gesture you make, I will immediately thrust my knife into your heart.”

And while saying this, the man flashed in the bailiff's terrified face a long knife, whose blue blade had a sinister lustre.

“You are mad, José—quite mad,” the other answered, affecting a tranquillity he was far from feeling at the announcement; “I never intended to insult you, and shall never do so; so let go my mule's bridle,

pray, and we will continue our journey in peace."

"That will do," the Indian said, with his eternal grin; "that is the way you must speak for us to remain good friends during the period we shall have to pass together."

And after letting go the mule, he began trotting in front with that swinging pace of which Indians alone possess the secret, and which enables them to follow a trotting horse for several days, without becoming tired.

The conversation had taken place sufficiently near to Kidd's lurking-place for him to overhear every syllable. Suddenly he started. An idea doubtless crossed his mind, for after allowing the horsemen to go on, but not too far for him to catch them up, he left his thicket, and went after them, growling between his teeth,—

"What the deuce relations can these birds of night have with Don Rufino Contreras? Well, we shall soon see."

On turning into the track he saw the party a short distance ahead of him. The latter, whom the sound of his horse's hoofs

stamping on the dry ground, had already warned, looked back rather anxiously, the more so because the bandit, in spite of the ease he tried to affect, had nothing very prepossessing about his appearance or face. Policemen could form no mistake about him. Hence they did not do so, and at the first glance recognised him as what he really was—that is to say, a bandit. But in Mexico, as in many other countries which pretend, rightly or wrongly, to be civilized, policemen and ruffians have the best possible reasons for living on friendly terms; and had it not been for the solitary spot where he was, Don Parfindo Purro (such was the Alguazil's name) saw nothing very disagreeable in meeting the adventurer. The latter continued to advance, talking to his horse, tickling its flanks with his spur, galloping, with his fist proudly placed on his hip, and his hat pulled impudently over his right ear.

“*Santas tardes, caballeros,*” he said, as he joined the party of men in black, and slightly checked his horse, so that it should keep pace with the others, “by what fortunate accident do I meet you so late on this desolate road?”

"Fortune is with us, caballero," Don Parfindo answered, politely; "this accursed Indian has led us a roundabout road; I really believe, whatever he may say, that we have lost our way, or shall soon do so."

"That is possible," Kidd observed; "and without being too curious, will you allow me to ask whither you are going? moreover, to set you at your ease by displaying confidence, I will inform you that I am going to Quitovar."

"Ah!" said the bailiff, "that is very lucky."

"Why so?"

"Because I am going there too, in the first instance. Are we still a great distance from the pueblo?"

"Only a few leagues; we shall arrive before two o'clock, and if you will allow me to take your guide's place, I shall be delighted to show you the way, which, I confess, is not very easy to find."

"Your proposal delights me, caballero, and I most heartily accept it."

"That is agreed; if you do not know the pueblo, I will take you to a capital

house, where you will be excellently treated."

"I thank you, caballero; it is the first time I have been to Real de Minas. I am a bailiff at Hermosillo."

"A bailiff!" the bandit said; "carai! that is a famous profession."

"At your service, were I competent for it," Don Parfindo said, puffing himself out.

"I do not say no," Kidd continued, giving himself an air of importance. "When a man carries on a large business, as I do, the acquaintance of a caballero so distinguished as you appear to be can only be most advantageous."

"You confound me, senor."

"Oh, do not thank me, for what I say I really think; I was speaking about it only a few days back to Don Rufino Contreras, who is also very rich, and consequently has numerous trials."

"Do you know Don Rufino?" the bailiff asked, with rising respect.

"Which one?—the illustrious senator?"

"Himself."

"He is one of my most intimate friends. Are you acquainted with him too?"

"He has instructed me to proceed in his name against certain debtors of his."

"*Viva Dios!* this is a strange meeting," the adventurer exclaimed, with a radiant face.

"What a worthy senor!" the bailiff remarked, "and so honourable!"

The two scoundrels understood each other. The acquaintance was formed, and confidence sprang up quite naturally. The conversation was continued on the best possible terms; Kidd adroitly led the other to make a general confession, and the latter, believing that he had to do with an intimate of Don Rufino, told him the secret of the negotiations he was intrusted with, without any visible pressure. Altogether, this is what the adventurer learned:—

Don Rufino Contreras, impelled by some motive unknown, had secretly bought up the claims of all the persons to whom the Marquis de Moguer was indebted. So soon as he held them, he had taken out writs, through a third party, against the Marquis, so as to dispossess him of the small property left him—among other things, the Hacienda del Toro, which he evinced a

great desire to possess. His proposal to marry Donna Marianna was only a bait offered to the good faith of Don Hernando, in order to lull his prudence and remove his suspicions. What he wanted was to become, at any price, proprietor of the hacienda. But still, wishing to retain the mask of friendship, by the aid of which he had hitherto deceived the Marquis, he had put the matter in the hands of a man of his own, who had orders to push matters to extremities, and accept no arrangement. Don Parfindo Purro was the bailiff selected: he was the bearer of the most perverse instructions and strictest orders, and was resolved to accomplish to the letter what he emphatically called his duty.

In Mexico, we are compelled to allow that justice is the most derisive buffoon and horrible thing imaginable. The judges, most of whom are utterly ignorant, and who act *gratis*, as their salaries are never paid, requite themselves for this annoyance on the contending parties, whom they plunder without pity or shame; and this is carried to such an extent, that, so soon as trial is begun, it is known who will win and

who lose. It is little consequence whether the trial be criminal or civil. Money decides everything. To give only one instance: A man commits a murder, the fact is confirmed—known by all; the assassination has been performed in bright day, in the open street, and in the presence of a hundred persons. The relations of the victim go before the *juez de letras*—that is to say, the criminal judge; he lets them explain the affair in its fullest details, and gives no signs of approval or disapproval; but when they have finished, he asks them the simple question—

“Have you any witnesses?”

“Yes,” the relatives answer.

“Very good; and these witnesses are doubtless men of good position and of a certain value?”

“Certainly. Each of them is worth a thousand piastres.”

“Well,” says the judge, “and how many may there be?”

“Ten.”

“What a pity!” he then continues, in his mildest accents; “your adversary, who, between ourselves, appears to me a highly

distinguished caballero, has exactly the same number of witnesses as you ; but his are far more important people, for each is worth two thousand piastres."

The matter is settled. If the relatives of the murdered man are not rich enough to make a higher bid, the assassin is not only acquitted, but discharged without a stain on his character, and is at perfect liberty, if he think proper, to kill another of his enemies on the same day and the same terms. Such is the way in which the Mexicans understand justice. We can therefore understand how an enormously rich man like Don Rufino Contreras could defeat the Marquis, the state of whose fortune did not allow him to buy the judges.

The adventurer listened with the most earnest attention to the revelations the bailiff made with a certain degree of complacency. Kidd, who was accustomed to fish in troubled waters, had found an opportunity for a famous haul in these revelations. His plan was at once formed, and so soon as he came in sight of the pueblos his arrangements were made. It was late when the

travellers reached the barriers of the Real de Minas; the sun had set long before, and the sentries, although they recognised the adventurer as one of their side, made some difficulty about letting him and his companions into the town. They were engaged for nearly an hour in parleying outside, and it was only by the express orders of the commandant that they obtained permission at last to enter the pueblo, which had been converted into a regular fortress.

Kidd, still continuing to act as guide to his comrades, led them straight to a meson, where he left them at liberty to rest themselves, after warmly recommending them to the landlord. Then the bandit, after placing his horse in the corral, and carefully wrapping himself up in his zarape, and pulling the brim of his hat over his eyes to escape recognition, glided through the darkness to the house of Don Marios de Nija, which he entered. The captain, as we said, was accessible at all hours of the day or night, to any person who had news to communicate. At this moment he was in the same study where he had already held a conversation

with Master Kidd. On noticing the adventurer, the captain raised his eyes, and without leaving his chair, he said—

“Ah, is that you, Master Kidd? Your absence has been long; but for all that, you are welcome, if you bring good news.”

The bandit gave a meaning smile.

“My news is excellent, captain,” he said, laying a marked stress on the words, “especially for you.”

“*Juego de Cristi!* I hope so, for am I not commandant of the town?”

“Yes; but I am not going to talk with you about politics at present, Excellency.”

“In that case, go to the deuce, scoundrel,” the captain said, shrugging his shoulders angrily; “do you think I have nothing more important to do than listen to the rubbish you may please to invent and tire my ears with?”

“I invent nothing, Excellency. Fortune has this very day granted me the opportunity of catching a secret it is most important for you to know—that is all.”

“Well, tell me what this mighty secret is.”

“It relates to your private affairs, Excellency.”

"My affairs!" the captain repeated, bursting into a laugh; "hang it all! have I any?"

"If the secret does not relate directly to you, it interests in a most eminent degree one of your nearest relatives."

"Ah! who is he?"

"The Marquis de Moguer."

The captain became serious; he frowned with a menacing expression, which made Kidd tremble in spite of his well-bred effrontery.

"Speak, and be brief," he said to him.

"Nothing will suit me better."

The captain took several ounces from the table drawer, which he threw to the bandit, who caught them in their flight, and stowed them away with a grin of satisfaction in his huge pockets.

"You will not regret your money, Excellency," he said.

"I hope not; and now go on, scoundrel, as you are paid."

Kidd, without further pressing, related in its fullest details all that had occurred between himself and the bailiff on the road. The captain listened with the most earnest attention.

"Is that all?" he asked, when the other stopped.

"Yes, Excellency."

"Good; now be off. You will continue to watch this man, and report to me all he does."

And he dismissed him with a wave of the hand. The adventurer bowed, and went away. When alone, the captain reflected for a few minutes, and then wrote a letter, sealed it, and summoned his orderly, who at once made his appearance.

"Isidro," the captain said to him, "at all risks this letter must be in the hands of the Marquis de Moguer within six hours at the most. You understand me?—at all risks?"

"It shall be done, captain."

"Take this for yourself"—and he handed him some gold coins—"and this pass, which will enable you to go in and out. You must be off at once."

Without replying, the soldier withdrew, after concealing the letter in the breast of his uniform.

"And now," the captain muttered to himself, "let them come on."

CHAPTER XII.

COMPLICATIONS.

AFTER leaving the captain's study, Kidd halted in the anteroom, not because he had any plan formed, but through that instinct which urges villains of his species not to leave a good place till compelled. He had heard the captain summon his assistento. The latter, after a few moments' absence, returned to the anteroom with a look of importance which at once caused the adventurer to reflect, and suggested to him the idea of knowing what the conversation was the soldier had held with his chief. Isedro, the captain's assistento, was an Opatas Indian, of tried bravery and fidelity. Unluckily, though he did his duty in the battle-field, his intellect was rather restricted, and, like all Indians, he had a

propensity for strong liquors, which had several times brought him to great grief. Kidd was familiar with the soldier, and knew his weakness; hence his plan was formed in a moment.

"Since you remain here," he said to him, "I shall be off: when I came to speak to the captain, I left a nearly full bottle of mezcal at the tocanda of Master Cospeto, and on my word I feel inclined to go and finish it. I will not invite you to accompany me, for your duty keeps you here; otherwise, you may be assured that I should be delighted to empty it with you."

"My duty does not keep me here," the Indian answered; "on the contrary, I have a long ride to make this very night."

"A long ride!" the adventurer exclaimed: "carai! it is the same case with me, and as I know no better preservative against the night cold than mezcal, that is why I meant to empty the bottle before mounting. If your inclinations lie the same way, it is at your service."

We will allow that the assistento hesitated.

"Have you also a ride to take?" he asked.

“Yes, and I suspect that yours is as long as mine: well, I am going a long distance; what direction do you follow?”

“The captain sends me to Arispe,” the bandit answered, boldly.

“Why, how singular that is! we shall follow the same road.”

“That is indeed strange. Well, is it settled?—will you drink the stirrup-cup with me?”

“Upon due reflection, I see no harm in it.”

“Let us make haste, then,” the brigand continued, for he feared lest the captain might catch him with his assistento; “we have no time to lose.”

For reasons best known to himself, the adventurer left the Indian at the house door, bidding him bring his horse to Cospeto's rancho, where he would join him in a few minutes, and they would set out on their journey together. Kidd merely wanted to warn the mesonero, with whom he had lodged the bailiff, not to let him go away on any excuse—“Watch him closely, and at the slightest suspicious movement go and inform Captain Don Marios Nija”—who, for

reasons connected with the public safety, did not wish to let these strangers out of sight. The mesonero promised to carry out his instructions faithfully; and, reassured on this point, the adventurer fetched his horse from the corral, and went to join the Opatas at Senor Cospeto's rancho, as had been agreed on. On reaching the inn by one street, to his great satisfaction he saw the orderly arriving by another, mounted, and ready to start. The two friends entered the rookery to which we have already conducted the reader.

The adventurer honourably kept his word: not only did he order a bottle of mezcal, but at the same time one of excellent Catalonian refino. The Indian's prudence was entirely routed by such generosity; the more so because he had no reason to distrust the bandit, with whom he had already made several excursions, and regarded him as an excellent comrade. Kidd, in order to avoid any doubts on the part of his comrade, was careful not to ask him any questions; he merely poured him out glass after glass, and when the bottles were empty, the Indian had drunk the greater part of

their contents, as Kidd desired to retain his coolness. When they had finished, the bandit rose, paid the score, and called for another battle of refino.

"This is for the road," he said.

"An excellent idea remarked the assistant, whose eyes flashed like carbuncles, and who was beginning to have a very vague notion of the state of affairs. They left the rancho, and mounted their horses. Kidd was rather anxious as to how he should get out of the rancho, as he had no pass of any sort; for, if it were difficult to get into the Real de Minas, it was quite as much to get out of it. Luckily for the adventurer, Isidro's pass was in perfect order, and when he showed it at the gate, where he was perfectly well known to all the soldiers on duty, he said, pointing to Kidd, "This caballero goes with me." The soldiers, aware that Isidro was the confidential man of the captain, did not offer the slightest difficulty, but allowed them to pass, and wished them a lucky journey. When the adventurer found himself in the open country he drew a deep breath of relief, as he gave his too confiding comrade a sarcastic glance.

"Now," he said, "we must take the shortest road, in order to arrive sooner."

"What, are there two roads?" Isidro asked.

"There are ten," Kidd replied, coolly; "but the shortest runs almost in a right line, and passes close to the Hacienda del Toro."

"Let us take that, then."

"Why that more than another?"

"Because I am going to the hacienda."

"Ah," the adventurer said, pleasantly, "let us take a drink, and start." Uncorking the bottle, he took a pull, and then handed it to his companion, who imitated him, with an evident expression of pleasure.

"You say, then," Kidd resumed, as he smacked his lips, "that you are going to the Hacienda del Toro?"

"Yes, I am."

"It is a good house, and most hospitable."

"Do you know it?"

"Carai! I should think so. The majordomo is my intimate friend. What happy days I have spent with that excellent Senor Paredes!"

"Since it is your road, why not call there with me, as you are certain of a kind reception?"

"I do not say I will not; I suppose you are going to ask the Marquis for some men, as soldiers are scarce at the pueblo?"

"I do not think that is the case. Don Hernando has already authorized the captain to enlist his miners, and the peons left him he will need to defend the hacienda in the event of an attack."

"That is true; besides, it is no business of mine. Let every man have his own secrets."

"Oh, I do not think there is any great secret in the matter: the captain is a near relation of the Marquis; they often write to each other, and the letter I am ordered to deliver will only refer, I expect, to family matters and private interests."

"That is probable; the more so, because it is said that the Marquis's affairs are in a very bad state at present."

"So it is said; but I have heard that they are about to be settled."

"Carai! I wish it with all my heart, for it is a pity to see one of the oldest families

of the province reduced. Suppose we drink the health of the Marquis?"

"With pleasure."

The bottle was hugged for the second time by the two companions. A man may be an Opatas Indian, that is to say, of herculean stature, with a breast arched like a tortoiseshell; but he cannot swallow with impunity such a prodigious quantity of alcohol as Isedro had absorbed without beginning to feel intoxicated. The assistento, strong though he was, tottered on his horse; his eyes began to close, and his tongue to grow thick. But, excited as he was by liquor, the more difficulty he experienced in speaking, the more he wanted to do so. The adventurer eagerly followed the progress of his comrade's intoxication, while careful not to let him see that he was aware of his condition.

"Yes, yes," the Indian continued, "the affairs of the Marquis might easily be arranged sooner than is supposed, comrade."

"With his name it cannot be difficult for him to procure money."

"Nonsense! that is not the point, and I know what I know."

"Exactly, Senor Isedro ; and as what you know may be a secret, I will not urge you to tell it me."

"Did I say that it was a secret?" the Indian objected.

"No, but I suppose so."

"You are wrong to suppose so ; and, besides, you are my friend, are you not?"

"I believe so," the adventurer answered, modestly.

"Well, if you are my friend, I have nothing to conceal from you."

"That is true ; still, if you consider it your duty to hold your tongue——"

"Hold my tongue ! why so ? Have you any pretence to silence me?"

"I ? Heaven forbid, and the proof is, here's your health !"

The Indian began laughing.

"That is what is called an unanswerable argument," he said, as he placed the bottle to his lips and threw back his head, as if contemplating the stars.

He remained in this position till all the remaining liquid had passed down his throat.

"Ah !" he said, with an accent of regret, "it was good."

"What do you mean?" Kidd exclaimed, with pretended surprise; "is there none left?"

"I do not think so," the Indian remarked, with a drunkard's gravity; "it is a pity that these bottles are so small."

And with that he threw it into the road.

"I agree with you that the rancheros are robbers."

"Yes," said the assistento, with a hic-cough, "robbers; but soon—we shall drink as much as we like."

"Eh, eh, that will not be unpleasant; but where will it be?"

"Where? why, at the Hacienda del Toro."

"Yes, they never refuse a draught of mezcal to an honest man in that house."

"Nonsense, a draught! you are jesting, comrade; whole bottles would be nearer the truth. Besides, do you fancy the Marquis will look into matters so closely at his daughter's marriage?"

"What?"

"Where on earth do you come from, that you are ignorant of that? Nothing else is spoken of in the country."

"It is the first I have heard of it."

"Well, all the better; I will tell you. Donna Marianna, a pretty girl, carai! is going to marry a senator, no one less."

The adventurer suddenly pricked up his ears.

"A senator?" he repeated.

"This seems to surprise you. Why should not a pretty girl marry a senator? I consider you a curious comrade to doubt my word."

"I do not doubt it."

"Yes, you do; ugly brute that you are."

The intoxication of the Opatas was at its height. Excited even more by the horse's gallop and the adventurer's artfully managed contradiction, Isedro felt passion mount to his head. The intoxication of Indians is horrible: they become raving madmen; their heated brain gives birth to the strangest hallucinations, and under the influence of spirits they are capable of the greatest crimes. The bandit was aware of all these peculiarities, by which he hoped to profit; he had drawn from the Indian all that he wanted to learn from him; he had squeezed him like a lemon, and now only wanted to

throw away the peel. We need hardly say that at this hour of the night the road the two travellers were following was completely deserted, and that Kidd did not fear any overlookers of what he intended doing. They were riding at this moment along the course of a small stream, a confluent of the Rio Bravo del Norte, whose wooded banks afforded sufficient concealment. The adventurer made his horse bound on one side, and drawing his machete, exclaimed—

“Brute yourself, you drunken Opatas!” At the same moment he dealt the poor fellow such a sudden blow that he fell off his horse like a log. But he rose to his feet tottering, and though stunned by the attack, and seriously wounded, he drew his sabre and rushed on the bandit with a yell of fury. But the latter was on his guard; he attentively watched his enemy’s movements, and urged his horse forward. The Indian, thrown down by the animal’s chest, rolled on the ground where he lay without stirring. Was he dead? Kidd supposed so; but the bandit was a very prudent man, Indians are crafty, and this death might be a feint. Kidd

therefore watched quietly a few paces from his victim, for he was in no hurry.

A quarter of an hour elapsed, and the Indian had not made a movement. Reassured by this complete immobility, the bandit resolved to dismount and go up to him. All at once the Opatas rose; with a tiger leap he bounded on the adventurer, twined his arms round him, and the two men rolled on the ground, uttering savage yells, and trying to take each other's life. It was a short but horrible struggle. The Opatas, in spite of his wounds, derived a factitious strength from the fury that animated him and the excitement produced by intoxication, which was heightened by his ardent desire to take revenge for the cowardly treachery of which he was the victim.

Unhappily, the efforts he was compelled to make opened his wounds, and his blood flowed in streams; and with his blood he felt his life departing. He made a supreme effort to strangle the miserable adventurer in his clenched fingers; but the latter, by a sudden and cleverly calculated movement, succeeded in liberating himself from the

Indian's iron grasp. He rose quickly, and at the moment when the assistant recovered from his surprise, and prepared to renew the fight, Kidd raised his machete, and cleft the poor fellow's head.

"Dog! accursed dog!" he yelled.

The Indian remained on his feet for a moment, tottering from right to left; he took a step forward with outstretched arms, and then fell with his face to the ground and the death-rattle in his throat. This time he was really dead.

"Well," Kidd muttered, as he thrust his machete several times into the ground, in order to remove the blood, "that was tough work; these demons of Indians must be killed twice to make sure they do not recover. What is to be done now?"

He reflected for a few moments; then walked up to the corpse, turned it over, and opened the breast of the uniform to obtain the letter. He had no difficulty in finding it; he placed it in his own pocket, and then stripped his victim, on the chance that he might want to use his uniform. But two things troubled him: the first was the soldier's horse; the second, his bag. The

horse he made no attempt to seize ; so soon as its master was wounded, the animal started off at a gallop into the wood ; and as it would have been madness to try and find it on so dark a night, the adventurer did not attempt it. Still the flight of the horse alarmed him. Any persons who found it would take it back to the pueblo, and then suspicions would be aroused which might soon be fixed on him, although he felt almost certain that the soldiers who saw him leave the town with the assistento had not recognised him ; but his absence from the pueblo would appear suspicious to the captain, who was acute, and as he knew Kidd so well, would not hesitate to accuse him.

The affair was embarrassing ; but luckily for him, the adventurer was a man of resources. Any other person would have fastened a stone to the body, and thrown it into the stream, but the bandit carefully avoided that. Such an expeditious method, while getting rid of the victim, would only have increased the suspicions ; besides, water is not a good keeper of secrets ; one day or another the body would rise perhaps to the surface, and then the nature of the wounds

would reveal the hand that dealt them. Kidd hit upon a more simple or sure plan, or at least he thought so. With horrible coolness he scalped the corpse, and threw the scalp into the stream, after rolling it round a large stone; this first profanation accomplished, he made a cross cut on the victim's chest, plucked out his heart, which he also threw into the river, and then plaiting together a few flexible lianas, he formed a cord, which he fastened to the feet of the corpse, and hung it from the main branch of a tree.

"There!" he said, with satisfaction, when the horrible task was completed, "that is all right, carai! I am ready to wager my share of paradise with the first comer that the cleverest people will be taken in. The Indians are in the field at this very moment, and hang me if every one will not be convinced that this drunken scoundrel was scalped by the Apaches."

In fact, all the hideous mutilating which this villain has made his victim undergo is employed by the Indian bravos upon their enemies. Frightful though the deed was, Kidd consequently, in the impossibility he

found of disposing of the body, had employed the best mode in which to divert suspicion.

Before leaving the scene of the murder, the bandit carefully washed the soldier's clothes and removed any blood-stains from his own; then, after assuring himself by a searching glance that there was nothing to denounce the crime of which he had been guilty, he whistled up his horse, and mounted, after carefully fastening the soldier's uniform behind him. He rolled a cigarette, lit it, and set out again, with the satisfaction of a man who has just succeeded in a most important affair, which has caused him great anxiety.

It was somewhat by chance that Kidd originally told the assistento that he was proceeding to Arispe; but the discovery of the letter, and the soldier's confidential remarks, had converted this chance into certainty. The bandit had discovered, amid all poor Isidro's drunken maundering, one leading idea, and scented a profitable stroke of business. He comprehended of what importance it would be to Don Rufino to be informed of all that was going on at the

pueblo at the Hacienda del Toro, that he might be able to arrange his plans with certainty. Consequently, the adventurer resolved to ride at full speed to Arispe, determined to make the senator pay dearly for the news he brought, while making a mental reservation, with that adventurous logic he was so skilful in, to betray Don Rufino on the first opportunity, if his own interests demanded that painful sacrifice of him. All this being thoroughly settled in his mind, the bandit started at full speed in the direction of Arispe, which city he reached by sunrise.

CHAPTER XIII.

TWO VILLAINS.

As Kidd was well known, he easily obtained admission to the town; but when he had passed the gates, he reflected that it was too early for him to call on the senator, who would still be asleep. Hence he proceeded straight to a rancho he knew, a suspicious den, the usual gathering-place of fellows of his sort, where he was certain of a hearty welcome by payment. In fact, the ranchero, who on first seeing him assumed an ill-omened grimace, greeted him with the most agreeable smile when he flashed before his eyes some piastres and gold coins.

The adventurer entered the rancho, left his horse in the corral, and immediately began to arrange his toilette, which was as a general rule neglected, but which his

struggle with the assistento and his hurried ride had rendered more disorderly than usual; and then waited, smoking and drinking, for the hour to arrive when he could pay his respects to Don Rufino.

The ranchero, who was thoroughly acquainted with his man and his habits, prowled round him in vain to try and sound him and learn the causes of his appearance in Arispe, where, for certain reasons, the police did not care to see him. This rendered his journeys to that town rather few and far between; for the police there, as elsewhere, are very troublesome to a certain class of citizens. But vainly did the ranchero try all his cleverest ruses, his most delicate insinuations; Kidd only answered his questions by insignificant phrases, crafty smiles and winks; but in the end he remained perfectly impenetrable, a want of confidence by which the ranchero was greatly insulted, and he swore to himself to be avenged on the bandit for it some day.

When the Cabildo clock struck nine, Kidd thought it was time to be off; he rose, majestically threw a piastre on the table in

payment of his score, wrapped his zarape round him, and left the house.

"Whom can he have assassinated to be so rich?" the ranchero asked himself, as he cunningly watched him depart.

A reflection which proved that the worthy ranchero was well acquainted with his man.

Kidd felt he was watched, and hence carefully avoided going straight to the senator's house; on the contrary, affecting the careless demeanour of a loungeur, he set out in the diametrically opposite direction. The adventurer then walked about the town for half-an-hour, while carefully avoiding the more frequented streets, for fear of attracting attention on himself; thus he gradually approached the senator's mansion, and hurriedly slipped under the saguan, after assuring himself by a glance all around that no one had seen him enter.

"Holloa, you fellow!" a voice suddenly shouted to him, making him start and stop; "where the deuce are you going like that? and what do you want here?"

The adventurer raised his eyes, and saw an individual of a certain age, easily to be

recognised as a domestic by his clothing, who was standing in the hall door, and resolutely barring his way.

"What do I want?" the bandit repeated, to give himself time to seek an answer.

"Yes, what do you want? That is clear enough, I suppose?"

"Carai! it is clear; what can I want except to see his Excellency, Senator Don Rufino Contreras?"

"Excellent," the other said, derisively; "and do you suppose his Excellency will receive you without knowing who you are?"

"And why not, if you please, senor?"

"Because you do not look like drawing-room company."

"Do you think so?" the bandit said, haughtily.

"Why, that is plain enough; you much more resemble a lepero than a caballero."

"You are not polite, my good fellow; what you say may be correct, but the remark is uncalled for; patched clothes often conceal very honourable caballeros, and if I have been ill treated by fortune, that is no reason why you should throw it in my teeth so sharply."

"Enough of this, and be off."

"I shall not stir 'till I have seen the senator."

The man-servant gave him a side look, which the other endured with imperturbable coolness.

"Do you mean that?" he asked him.

"I really do."

"For the last time, I order you to be gone," the valet went on, menacingly.

"Take care of what you are doing, comrade; I have to talk with the senor, and he is expecting me."

"Expecting you?"

"Yes, me!" the scoundrel answered, majestically.

The servant shrugged his shoulders contemptuously: still he reflected, and asked, with a more conciliatory tone than he had yet employed—

"Your name?"

"You do not want to know it; merely tell your master that I have just come from Hacienda del Toro."

"If that is the case, why did you not tell me so before?"

"Probably because you did not ask me.

Go and announce me to your master ; you have kept me waiting too long already."

The domestic went off without replying, and Kidd took advantage of his departure to instal himself in the vestibule. For a hundred reasons he did not like the vicinity of the street, and he was glad to be no longer exposed to the curious glances of passers by. The absence of the servant was not long, and when he returned his manner was entirely changed.

"Caballero," he said, with a bow, "if you will do me the honour of following me, his Excellency is waiting for you."

"Fellow ! too insolent before, too humble now," the adventurer said, crushing him with a contemptuous glance ; "show the way."

And, laughing in his beard, he followed the footman, who was red with anger and shame at this haughty reprimand.

Mexican houses, except in the great cities, are ordinarily built but one story high ; they are generally very slightly constructed, owing to the earthquakes, which are extremely frequent in intertropical countries, and destroy in a few seconds towns, and en-

tirely ruin them. The result of this mode of building is that nearly all the apartments are on the ground floor; and then there are no staircases to ascend or descend, which, in our opinion, is very agreeable. The adventurer remarked with some degree of pleasure that the valet led him through several rooms before reaching the one in which the senator was sitting; at length he turned the handle of the door, threw it open, and stepped aside to let the bandit pass. The latter walked in boldly, like a man certain of a hearty reception.

"Ah!" said the senator, starting slightly at seeing him, "it is you."

"Yes," he replied, with a graceful bow.

"Retire," Don Rufino said to the valet; "I am not at home to anyone, and do not come in till I call you."

The valet bowed, went out, and closed the door behind him. As if by common accord, the two stood silently listening till the valet's footsteps died away in the distance; then, without saying a word, Kidd threw open the folding doors.

"Why do you do that?" Don Rufino asked him.

"Because we have to talk about serious matters; the *pitates* spread over the floors of your rooms deaden footsteps, and your servant has an excellent spy's face."

The senator made no remark; he doubtless recognised the correctness of his singular visitor's argument.

"It is you then, bandit," he said at last.

"I fancy I can notice that you did not expect me?"

"I confess it; I will even add that I did not in the slightest desire your visit."

"You are very forgetful of your friends, Don Rufino, and it makes me feel sorry for you," the bandit answered, with a contrite air.

"What do you mean, scoundrel, by daring to use such language to me?"

Kidd shrugged his shoulders, drew up a butacea, and fell into it with a sigh of relief.

"I must observe," he said, with the most imperturbable coolness, "that you forgot to offer me a chair."

Then, crossing one leg over the other, he began rolling a cigarette, a task to which he gave the most serious attention. The

senator frowningly examined the adventurer; for this bandit to dare assume such a tone with him, he must have very powerful weapons in his hands, or be the bearer of news of the highest importance. In either case he must be humoured. Don Rufino immediately softened the expression of his face, and handed the adventurer a beautifully chased gold mechero.

"Pray light your cigarette, my dear Kidd," he said, with a pleasant smile.

The bandit took the mechero, and examined it with admiration.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, with a splendidly feigned regret, "I have dreamed for years that I possessed such a toy, but, unluckily, fortune has ever thwarted me."

"If it please you so much," Don Rufino answered, with a mighty effort, "I shall be delighted to make you a present of it."

"You are really most generous. Believe me, senor, that any present coming from you will always be most precious in my eyes."

And, after lighting his cigarette, he unceremoniously placed the mechero in his pocket.

"Of course your visit has an object?" the senator said, after a moment's interval.

"They always have, senor," the other answered, as he enveloped himself in a cloud of blue smoke, which issued from his nose and mouth; "the first was to see you."

"I thank you for the politeness; but I do not think that is sufficient reason for forcing your way in here."

"Forcing is rather a harsh word, senor," the bandit said, sorrowfully; but he suddenly changed his tone, and assumed his usual sharp, quick way. "Come, Don Rufino, let us deal fairly, and not waste our time in compliments which neither of us believes."

"I wish nothing better; speak, then, and the plague take you."

"Thank you. I prefer that mode of speech, for at least I recognise you. I am about to give you an example of frankness; I have come, not to propose a bargain, but to sell you certain information, and a letter of the utmost importance to you, which I obtained—no matter how—solely on your account."

"Good; let us see whether I can accept the bargain."

"In the first place, allow me to say two words, so as to thoroughly establish our reciprocal position. Our situation has greatly changed during the last few days; I no longer fear you, but you, on the contrary, are afraid of me."

"I afraid of you?"

"Yes, senor, because I hold your secret, and you can no longer threaten to kill me, as you did at our last interview."

"Oh! oh! And why not, if you please?" the senator asked.

"Because we are alone, you are unarmed, I am stronger than you, and at your slightest movement I would blow out your brains like those of a wild beast. Do you now comprehend me, my dear sir?" he added, as he drew a brace of pistols from under his zarape; "what do you think of these play-things?"

"They are tolerably good, I fancy," the senator replied, coldly; "and what do you say to these?" he added, as he uncovered a brace of magnificent pistols hidden under

the papers scattered over the table at which he was seated.

“They are detestable.”

“Why so?”

“Because you would not dare use them.”

The senator smiled ironically.

“Laugh, if you like, my master; I like best to see you treat the matter in that way; but I repeat that you are in my power this time, instead of my being in yours. I have delivered to Captain Don Marcos Nija certain papers, which, were they opened by him, might, I fear, gravely compromise you; there is one among them, the tenor of which is as follows:—‘I, the undersigned, declare that my valet, Lupino Contrarias, has treacherously assassinated and deserted me in a frightful desert, and there plundered me of everything I possessed, consisting of two mules laden with gold-dust, and two thousand three hundred gold ounces in current money. On the point of appearing before my God, and not hoping to survive my wounds, I denounce this wretch, etc. etc. Signed ——.’ Shall I tell you the name of the signer? But what is the matter with you, my dear

sir? Do you feel ill? You are as pale as a corpse."

In truth, on hearing the narrative, which the bandit told with a species of complacency, the senator was seized with such a violent fit of terror, that for a moment he was on the point of fainting.

"It is extraordinary," the bandit continued, "how nothing can be trusted to in this world. Just take the case of this excellent Lupino, who had arranged a most delicious trap in the adroitest manner: for more surety, he waited till they were on the other side of the Indian border, at a spot where not a soul passes once in two years: he fires his pistols point blank into his master's back, and goes off, of course taking with him the fortune so honourably acquired. Well, fatality decrees that the master whom he had every reason for believing dead is not quite so; he has time to take out his tablets, and write in pencil a perfectly regular denunciation, and then this demon of a fatality, which never does things by halves, brings to these parts a hunter, who picks up the tablets. It is enough to make a man turn honest, deuce

take me if it is not, had he not quite made up his mind to the contrary."

During this long harangue the senator had time to recover from the shock, and regain his coolness. By a supreme effort of the will he had restored calmness to his face, and forced his lips to smile.

"Carai!" he said, with a laugh that resembled gnashing of teeth, "that is a wonderful story, and admirably arranged. Permit me, dear senor, to congratulate you on your inventive faculty; it is charming, on my word. But who on earth do you expect to believe such a story?"

"You, first of all, senor, for you know the truth of the story better than anybody."

"Nonsense! you are mad, upon my honour."

"Not quite so mad as you fancy, for the proofs are in my hands."

"I do not say they are not; but admitting the reality of the facts you allege, they took place a long time ago; this Lupino Contrarias has disappeared; he is dead, perhaps: as for his master, the pistols were

too well loaded to give him a chance of escape. Who takes any interest in a dead man—especially in our country?”

“How do you know that the weapons were so carefully loaded?”

“I suppose so.”

“Suppositions are always the plague in business matters. Between ourselves, do you think it would be so difficult to find this Lupino Contrarias in Rufino Contreras? I think not.”

The senator felt his face flush involuntarily.

“Senor,” he said, “such an insinuation—”

“Has nothing that needs offend you,” Kidd interrupted him, calmly; “it is a supposition, nothing more; now, continuing our suppositions, let us admit for a moment that this master, whom his valet is persuaded he killed, should be, on the contrary, alive and—”

“Oh, that is quite impossible.”

“Do not interrupt me so, senor. And, I say, were to lay his hand on his valet’s shoulder, as I lay mine on yours, and assert, ‘This is my assassin!’ what answer would you give to that?”

"I—I!" the senator exclaimed, wildly; "what answer should I give?"

"You would give none," the bandit continued, as he took and thrust into his belt the pistols which the senator, in his trouble, had let fall; "overcome by the evidence, and crushed by the very presence of your victim, you would be irretrievably lost."

There was a second of horrible silence between these two men, who looked at each other as if about to have a frightful contest. At length the senator's emotion was calmed by its very violence; he passed his hand over his damp forehead, and, drawing himself up to his full height, said, sharply—

"After this, what would you of me?"

"I am waiting to hear your resolution before I offer any conditions."

Don Rufino Contreras remained for some minutes plunged in deep thought. Kidd watched him attentively, ready to make use of his weapons if he saw the senator attempt any suspicious movement; but the latter did not even dream of it. Annihilated by the adventurer's staggering revelation, he looked round him wildly, racking his mind in vain to discover some way of escape from the

terrible dilemma in which he was placed. At length he raised his head, and looked the bandit fiercely in the face.

"Well, yes," he said to him resolutely, "all that you have narrated is true. I cowardly assassinated, to rob him of his fortune, the man who offered me a helping hand in my misery, and treated me as a friend rather than a servant. But this fortune, however badly it may have been acquired, I possess; by its means I have acquired a position in the world; by roguery and falsehood I have succeeded in imposing on everybody; I have rank and a name; and death alone could make me resign this position, so hardly attained. Now that I have spoken frankly with you, it is your turn to do the same. Tell me the conditions you intend to impose on me, and if they are fair, I will accept them; if not, whatever the consequences may be, I shall refuse them. Take care, for I am not the man to remain at the mercy of a villain like you; sooner than accept so horrible a situation I would denounce myself, and drag you down in my fall. Reflect carefully, then, before answering me, comrade, for my

proposition is in earnest. Once the bargain is concluded between us, we will say no more about it. I give you ten minutes to answer me."

This clear and categorical proposal affected the bandit more than he liked to show. He understood that he had to deal with one of those indomitable men who, once they have made their mind up, never alter it. The adventurer had nothing to gain by ruining Don Rufino, on the contrary; moreover, that never entered into his plan: he hoped to terrify him, and had succeeded; and now the only thing to be done by these two men, so well suited to understand each other, since they had frankly settled facts, was to attack the pecuniary question, and treat it as skilfully as they could; Kidd, therefore, prepared to begin the assault.

CHAPTER XIV.

A FRIENDLY BARGAIN.

DON RUFINO, with his head resting on his right hand, was carelessly playing with a paper-knife, and patiently waiting till his visitor thought proper to speak. This affected indifference perplexed the adventurer: men of Kidd's species instinctively distrust all that does not appear to them natural, and he felt embarrassed by this coolness, for which he could not account, and which he feared might contain a snare. At length he suddenly broke the silence.

"Before all, Don Rufino," he said, "I must tell you the motives of my visit."

"I do not at all care about them," the senator answered, negligently; "still, if you think my knowledge of them may be useful, pray let me hear them."

"I think that when you have heard me, you will change your opinion, senor, and recognise the importance of the service I propose to do you."

"That is possible, and I do not deny it," the senator said, ironically; "but you will allow, my dear Senor Kidd, that you interfere so thoroughly in my affairs, that it is difficult for me to decide, among all the combinations your mind takes pleasure in forming, whether your intentions are good or bad."

"You shall judge."

"Pray speak, then."

"I will tell you, in the first place, that a certain Alguazil, Don Parfindo Purro by name, arrived yesterday at the pueblo of Quitovar."

"Very good," the senator answered, looking fixedly at the bandit.

"Now, I do not know how it is, but the bailiff had scarce reached the pueblo, ere, by some strange fatality, Captain de Nija was informed of his arrival."

"Only think of that," the senator remarked, ironically; "ever that fatality of

which you now spoke to me; it is really being the plaything of misfortune."

In spite of the strong dose of effrontery with which nature had endowed him, the adventurer felt involuntarily troubled.

Don Rufino continued, with a light laugh—

"And still, through this implacable fatality, the captain was not only informed of the arrival of this worthy Don Parfindo, but also of the reasons that brought him."

"How do you know that?" Kidd exclaimed, with pretended surprise.

"Oh, I guess it, that is all," the senator replied, with a slight shrug of his shoulders; "but go on, pray; what you tell me is beginning to become most interesting."

The bandit went on with imperturbable coolness.

"As you are aware, the captain is a relation of the Marquis de Moguer."

"Yes, and a very near relation."

"Hence he did not hesitate, but at once sent off a messenger to the Hacienda del Toro, carrying a letter in which he probably gave the most circumstantial details about

the bailiff, and the mission he is charged with."

At this revelation, Don Rufino suddenly doffed the mask of indifference he had assumed, and smote the table fiercely with his fist.

"Ah, that letter!" he exclaimed, "that letter! I would give its weight in gold for it."

"Very well, senor," the bandit remarked, with a smile; "as I am anxious to prove to you the honesty of my intentions, I give it you for nothing."

He took the letter from his pocket, and handed it to the senator; the latter bounded on it like a tiger on its prey, and tore it from Kidd's hands.

"Gently, gently; be good enough to remark that the seal is not broken, and that, as the letter has not yet been opened, I am naturally ignorant of its contents."

"That is true," the senator muttered, as he turned it over and over; "I thank you for your discretion, senor."

"You are most kind," Kidd replied, with a bow.

"But," the senator continued, "how did

this letter, addressed to Don Hernando de Moguer, fall into your hands?"

"Oh, very simply," the other replied, lightly; "just fancy that the man the captain selected to carry his missive was a friend of mine. As I intended to pay you a visit at Arispe, and as I felt grieved at seeing this man traverse such a dangerous road alone by night, I offered to accompany him, and he consented. I do not know how it occurred, but on the road we began quarrelling. In short, without any evil intentions on my part, I declare to you, in the heat of the argument I gave him a blow on the head with my machete, so well dealt that he was compelled to die. It grieved me deeply, but there was no remedy; and as I was afraid lest the letter might get into bad hands, I carried it off. That is the whole story."

"It is really most simple," Don Rufino remarked, with a smile, and broke the seal.

Kidd discreetly sat down again in his butacca, in order to leave the senator at liberty to peruse this despatch, which seemed to interest him greatly. He read it through with the utmost attention, and

then let his head hang on his chest, and fell into deep thought.

"Well," the adventurer at length asked, "is the news that letter conveys so very bad, that it must entirely absorb you?"

"The news is of the utmost importance to me, senor; still, I ask myself for what purpose you seized it?"

"Why, to do you a service, it strikes me."

"That is all very well; but, between ourselves, you had another object."

The bandit burst into a laugh.

"Did I not tell you that I wish to make a bargain?"

"That is true; but I am awaiting a full explanation from you."

"That is very difficult, senor."

"I admit that it is; well, I will put you at your ease."

"I wish for nothing better."

"I will offer you the bargain you do not like to propose."

"I see that you are beginning to understand me, and that, between the pair of us, we shall come to something."

"You are not rich," the senator remarked, frankly approaching the point.

"I am forced to confess that I am not actually rolling in wealth," he answered, with an ironical glance at his more than ragged attire.

"Well, if you like I will make you a rich man at one stroke."

"What do you mean by rich, senor?" the bandit asked, distrustfully.

"I mean to put you in possession of a sum which will not only protect you from want, but also allow you to indulge your fancy, while living honestly."

"Honesty is a virtue only within reach of those who can spend money without wanting it," the adventurer remarked sententiously.

"Be it so; I will render you rich, to use your language."

"It will cost a good deal," Kidd answered, impudently, "for I have very peculiar tastes."

"I dare say; but no matter. I have in Upper California a hacienda, of which I will hand you the title-deeds this very day."

"Hum!" said Kidd, thrusting out his upper lip contemptuously, "is the hacienda a fine one?"

"Immense; covered with ganado and manades of wild horses; it is situated near the sea."

"That is something, I allow; but that is not wealth."

"Wait a minute."

"I am waiting."

"I will add to this hacienda a round sum of one hundred thousand piastres in gold."

The bandit's eyes were dazzled.

"What," he said, rising as if moved by a spring, and turning pale with joy, "did you say—one hundred thousand?"

"Yes, I repeat," the senator continued, internally satisfied with the effect he had produced; "do you think that with such a sum as that it is possible to be honest?"

"*Viva Christo!* I should think so!" he exclaimed, gleefully.

"It only depends on yourself to possess it within a week."

"Oh, yes, I understand; there is a condition. Carai! it must be very hard for me to refuse it."

"This is the condition; listen to

me, and, above all, understand me thoroughly."

"Carai! I should think I would listen; a hacienda, and one hundred thousand piastres—I should be a fool to refuse them."

"You must not impede my prospects in any way; allow me to espouse Donna Marianna, and on the day of the marriage hand me the tablets which you took from the gentleman so unhappily assassinated by his valet."

"Very well. Is that all?"

"Not yet."

"Very good; go on."

"I insist that when you deliver me the tablets, you will supply proof that the writer is really dead."

"Carai! that will be difficult."

"That does not concern me; it is your business."

"That is true; and how long will you give me for that?"

"Eight days."

"*Cuerpo de Christo!* it is not enough; the man is not so easily to be taken un-
awares."

"Yes; but once that he is dead, you will be rich."

"I know that, and it is a consideration. No matter; carai! it will be a tough job, and I shall risk my hide."

"You can take it or leave it."

"I take it, *viva Christo!* I take it. Never shall I find again such a chance to become an honest man."

"Then that matter is quite settled between us?"

"Most thoroughly; you can set your mind at rest."

"Very good; but as you may change your mind some day, and feel an inclination to betray me——"

"Oh, senor, what an idea!"

"No one knows what may happen. You will at once sign a paper on which these conditions will be fully detailed."

"Carai! what you ask is most compromising."

"For both of us, as my proposals will be equally recorded."

"But, in that case, what is the good of writing such a paper, as it will compromise you as much as me?"

"For the simple reason that if some day you feel inclined to betray me, you cannot ruin me without ruining yourself, which will render you prudent, and oblige you to reflect whenever a bad thought crosses your brain."

"Do you distrust me, senor?"

"Have you any excessive confidence in me?"

"That is different; I am only a poor scamp."

"In one word, you will either accept the conditions I offer, or any bargain between us will be impossible."

"Still, supposing, senor, I were to use the paper I hold, as you employ such language to me?"

"You would not dare."

"Not dare!" he exclaimed; "and pray why not?"

"I do not know the motive; but I feel sure that if you could have used that document, you would have done so long ago. I know you too well to doubt it, Senor Kidd; it would be an insult to your intellect, whose acuteness, on the contrary, it affords me pleasure to bear witness to. Hence, believe

me, senor, do not try to terrify me further with this paper, or hold it to my chest like a loaded pistol, for you will do no good. Your simplest plan will be to accept the magnificent offer I make you."

"Well, be it so, since you are so pressing," he replied; "I will do what you ask, but you will agree with me that it is very hard."

"Not at all; that is just where you make the mistake; I simply take a guarantee against yourself, that is all."

The adventurer was not convinced; still, the bait conquered him, and, with a sigh of regret, he offered no further resistance. Don Rufino immediately wrote down the conditions agreed on between the two men—a sword of Damocles, which the senator wished to hold constantly in suspense over the head of his accomplice, and which, if produced in a court of justice, would irretrievably destroy them both. While the senator was writing, the bandit sought for the means to escape this formidable compromise, and destroy the man who forced it on him when he had received the money. We should not like to assert that Don

Rufino had not the same idea. When the senator had concluded this strange deed of partnership, which rendered them mutually responsible, and riveted them more closely together than a chain would have done, he read in a loud voice what he had written.

"Now," he said, after reading, "have you any remark to offer?"

"Deuce take the remarks!" the bandit exclaimed, roughly; "whatever I might say, you would make no alteration, so it is better to leave it as it is."

"That is my opinion, too—so sign; and to soften any painful effect it may produce on you, I will give you one hundred ounces."

"Very good," he replied, with a smile; "and taking the pen from Don Rufino's hand, he boldly placed his signature at the foot of this document, which might cost him his life. But the promise of the hundred ounces made him forget everything; and besides, Kidd was a bit of a fatalist, and reckoned on chance to liberate him from his accomplice ere long."

When Kidd had signed with the greatest assurance, the senator sprinkled gold-dust

over the paper, folded it, and placed it in his bosom.

"And here," he said, as he thrust his hand into a coffer, "is the promised sum."

He piled the ounces on the table, and Kidd pocketed them with a smile of pleasure.

"You know that I am at your orders, and ready to obey you," he said; "and, as a beginning, I restore you the pistols, which I no longer require."

"Thanks. Have you anything to detain you at Arispe?"

"Not the slightest."

"Then you would offer no objection to leaving the town?"

"On the contrary, I intend to do so as soon as possible."

"That is most fortunate; I will give you a letter for Senor Parfindo, to whom I will ask you to deliver it immediately on your arrival."

"Then you want to send me to the pueblo?"

"Have you any repugnance to return there?"

"Not the slightest; still, I shall not

remain there on account of that night's business."

"Ah, yes, that is true, the soldier's death—take care."

"Oh, I shall only remain at the pueblo just long enough to perform the duty you entrust to me, and then leave it immediately."

"That will be most prudent. But no, stay; upon reflection, I think it will be better for you not to return to the Real de Minas. I will send my letter by another person."

"I prefer that; have you any other order to give me?"

"None, so you can do what you think proper; but remember that I expect you in a week, and so act accordingly."

"I shall not forget it, carai!"

"In that case, I will not detain you; good-bye."

"Till we meet again, senior."

The senator struck a gong, and the manservant appeared almost immediately. Don Rufino and Kidd exchanged a side glance; it was evident that the criado, curious like all servants, had listened at the door, and

tried to learn for what reason his master remained so long shut up with a man of the adventurer's appearance; but, thanks to the precautions Kidd had taken, even the sound of the voices, which were purposely suppressed, did not reach him.

"Show this caballero out," the senator said.

The two men bowed for the last time, as if they were the best friends in the world, and then separated.

"Villain!" Don Rufino exclaimed, so soon as he was alone; "if ever I can make you pay me for all the suffering you have forced on me to-day, I will not spare you."

And he passionately dashed down a splendid vase, which was unluckily within his reach.

For his part the adventurer, while following the servant through the apartments, indulged in reflections which were anything but rosy-coloured.

"Hang it all!" he said to himself, "the affair has been hot; I believe that I shall act wisely in distrusting my friend; the dear senor is far from being tender-hearted,

and if he has a chance of playing me an ill turn he will not let it slip. I did act wrong to sign that accursed paper; but, after all, what have I to fear? He is too much in danger to try and set a trap for me; but for all, I will be prudent, for that can do me no harm."

When he ended this soliloquy he found himself under the saguan, where the manservant took leave of him with a respectful bow. The adventurer pulled his wide hatbrim over his eyes, and departed. In returning to the rancho he employed the same precautions he had used in going to the senator's house, for he was not at all anxious to be recognised and arrested by the Alguazils; for, as we know, the streets of the town, for certain reasons, were not at all healthy for him. Kidd found the ranchero standing in his doorway, with straddled legs, attentively surveying the approaches to his house.

"Eh," the host said, with a bow, "back already?"

"As you see, compadre; but let me have my breakfast at once, for I have a deal to do."

"Are you going to leave us already?"

"I do not know; come, pray make haste."

The rancho served him without further questioning. The adventurer made a hearty meal, paid liberally to appease his host's ill temper, saddled his horse, and set out, without saying whether he should return or not. A quarter of an hour later he was in the open country, and inhaling with infinite pleasure the fresh, fragrant breeze that reached him from the desert.

CHAPTER XV.

THE HACIENDA DEL TORO.

WE will now leap over an interval of a fortnight, and return to the Hacienda del Toro ; but before resuming our story we will cursorily describe the events that occurred during this fortnight, in order to make the reader thoroughly understand by what a strange concourse of events accident brought all our characters face to face, and produced a collision among them, from which an unforeseen *dénouement* issued.

Donna Marianna, persuaded by Donna Esperanza, or perhaps unconsciously attracted by the secret longings of her heart, had consented to remain a couple of days with her. These days were occupied with pleasant conversation, in which the maiden at length disclosed the secret which she

imagined to be buried in the remotest nook of her heart. Donna Esperanza smiled with delight at this simple revelation of a love which she already suspected, and which everything led her to encourage.

Stronghand, for his part, had yielded to the magical fascination the maiden exercised over him. Feeling himself beloved, his restraint and coldness melted away to make room for an honest admiration. Carried away by the feelings that agitated him, he displayed all the true prudence and goodness contained in his character, which was, perhaps, rather savage, but it was that loyal and powerful savageness which pleases women, by creating in them a secret desire to conquer these rebellious natures, and dominate them by their delicious seductions. Women, as a general rule, owing to their very weakness, have always liked to subdue energetic men, and those who are reputed indomitable; for a woman is proud to be protected, and blushes when she is compelled to defend the man whose name she bears. Contempt kills love. A woman will never love a man except when she has the right to be proud of him, and can say

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to him, "Spare foes too weak for you, and unworthy of your anger."

During the two days the young couple did not once utter the word love, and yet they clearly explained it, and no longer entertained a doubt as to their mutual attachment.

Still it was time to think about returning to the hacienda. It was settled that Donna Marianna should inform her father about what she had learned from Donna Esperanza, that she should not positively refuse Don Rufino's hand, and quietly await events.

"Take care," the maiden said, as she held out her hand to the hunter; "my only hope is in you: if you fail in your plans I shall be left alone defenceless, and death alone will remain to me, for I shall not survive the loss of all my hopes."

"Trust to me, Donna Marianna; I have staked my happiness and my life on the terrible game I am preparing to play, and I feel convinced that I shall win it."

"I will pray to Heaven for both you and myself with such fervour, that I feel confident my prayers will be granted."

These words, with which the young people parted, were equivalent to a mutual engagement. Donna Esperanza tenderly embraced the maiden.

“Remember the legend,” she said to her, and Donna Marianna replied with a smile.

The tigrero held the horses by the bridle. Stronghand and ten hunters prepared to follow the travellers at a distance, in order to help them, should it be necessary. The journey was performed in silence. Donna Marianna was too much engaged in restoring some degree of order to her thoughts, which were upset by what had happened during the two days she spent among the hunters, to dream of saying a word to her companion; while he, for his part, confounded by the way in which he had been treated in camp, tried to explain the luxury and comfort which he had never before witnessed in the desert, and which plunged him into a state of amazement from which he could not recover.

As Donna Marianna had expressed a wish to reach their journey's end as quickly as possible, Marianno took a different road

from that which he had previously followed, and which ran to El Toro without passing by the rancho.

At about 3 P.M. they came in sight of the rock, and began scaling the path, and then noticed the hunters, commanded by Stronghand, drawn up in good order on the skirt of the forest. When the young lady reached the first gate of the hacienda, the sound of a shot reached her ear, and a white puff of smoke floating over the horsemen made her guess who it was that had fired it. Donna Marianna waved her handkerchief in the air. A second shot was fired, as if to show her that the signal was seen, and then the hunters turned round and disappeared in the forest. Donna Marianna entered the hacienda, and the first person she met was Paredes.

"*Valga mi Dios!* nina," the worthy majordomo exclaimed; "where have you come from? The Marquis has been excessively anxious about you."

"Does not my father know that I have been to pay a visit to my nurse?"

"Your brother told him so, nina; but as

your absence was so prolonged, the Marquis was afraid that some accident had happened to you."

"You see that it was not so, my good Paredes; so set your mind at rest, and go and reassure my father, to whom I shall be delighted to pay my respects."

"Don Hernando will be pleased at your return, nina; he is at this moment engaged with Don Ruiz in inspecting the walls on the side of the huerta, in order to make certain that they are in a sound condition; for we fear more and more an attack from the Indians."

"In that case do not disturb my father, and I will go and rest in the drawing-room, for I am exhausted with fatigue; and when my father has completed his inspection, you will inform him of my return. It is unnecessary to importune him now."

"Importune him!" exclaimed the honest majordomo; "excuse me, senorita, if I am not of your opinion on that head. *Viva Dios!* the Marquis would not forgive me if I did not immediately inform him of your return."

"In that case, act as you think proper, my worthy Paredes."

The majordomo, who had probably only been waiting for this permission, ran off.

"My dear Marianno," the young lady then said, addressing her foster-brother, "it is not necessary to tell what we have been doing during our absence. Everybody must suppose that I have not quitted my nurse's rancho; you understand, and I count on your discretion. When the time arrives, I intend myself to inform my father of all that has occurred."

"Enough, nina; you know that your wishes are orders for me. I will not say a word—besides, it is no business of mine."

"Very well, Marianno; now receive my sincere thanks for the services you have rendered me."

"You know that I am devoted to you, nina; I have merely done my duty, and you have no occasion to thank me for that."

The young lady offered him her hand with a smile, and entered her apartments. The tigrero, when left alone, took the bridles

of the two horses, and led them to the corral, through the crowd of rancheros who, by the Marquis's orders, had sought refuge in the hacienda, and had erected their jacals in all the courtyards. Donna Marianna was not sorry to be alone for a few minutes, in order to have time to prepare the conversation she intended to have with her father and brother, whose difficulties she did not at all conceal from herself.

The hacienda was very large, and hence, in spite of all his diligence, it was not till he had spent half an hour in sterile search, that the majordomo succeeded in finding his master. Don Hernando heard, with a lively feeling of joy, of his daughter's return, and immediately gave up his inspection in order to hurry to her. The more heavily misfortune pressed upon the Marquis, the greater became the affection he entertained for his children; he felt a necessity for resting on them, and drawing more closely the family ties. When he entered, with Don Ruiz, the room in which Donna Marianna was awaiting him, he opened his arms and embraced her tenderly.

"Naughty girl!" he exclaimed; "what

mortal anxiety you have caused me ! Why did you remain so long absent in these troublous times ?”

“Forgive me, my dear father,” the girl answered, as she returned his caresses ; “I incurred no danger.”

“Heaven be praised ! But why did you stay away from us for three days ?”

The young lady blushed.

“Father,” she answered, as she lavished on her parent those tender blandishments of which girls so thoroughly possess the secret, “during my entire absence I was only thinking of you.”

“Alas !” the Marquis murmured, with a choking sigh, “I know your heart, my poor child ; unhappily my position is so desperate that nothing can save me.”

“Perhaps you may be saved, father,” she said, with a toss of her head.

“Do not attempt to lead me astray by false hopes, which, in the end, would render our frightful situation even more cruel than it is.”

“I do not wish to do so, father,” she said, earnestly, “but I bring you a certainty.”

"A certainty, child! That is a very serious word in the mouth of a girl. Where do you suppose it possible to find the means to conjure ill fortune?"

"Not very far off, father; at this very place, if you like."

Don Hernando made no reply, but let his head drop on his chest mournfully.

"Listen to Marianna, father," Don Ruiz then said; "she is the angel of our home. I believe in her, for I am certain that she would not make a jest of our misfortunes."

"Thanks, Ruiz. Oh, you are right; I would sooner die than dream of increasing my father's grief."

"I know it, child," the Marquis answered, with sad impatience; "but you are young, inexperienced, and doubtless accept the wishes of your heart as certainties."

"Why not listen to what my sister has to say, father?" Don Ruiz said. If she is deceiving herself—if what she wishes to tell us does not produce on you the effect she expects from it, at any rate she will have given an undeniable proof of the lively inte-

rest she takes in your affairs; and were it only for that reason, both you and I owe her thanks."

"Of what good is it, children?"

"Good heavens, father! in our fearful situation we should neglect nothing. Who knows? Very frequently the weakest persons bring the greatest help. Listen to my sister first, and then you will judge whether her remarks deserve to be taken into consideration."

"As you press it, Ruiz, I will hear her."

"I do not press, father—I entreat. Come, speak, little sister; speak without fear, for we shall listen—at least I shall—with the liveliest interest."

Donna Marianna smiled sweetly, threw her arms round her father's neck, and laid her head on his shoulder with a charming gesture.

"How I love you, my dear father!" she said; "how I should like to see you happy! I have nothing to tell you, for you will not believe me; and what I might have to say is so strange and improbable, that you would not put faith in it."

"You see, child, that I was right."

"Wait a moment, father," she continued; "if I have nothing to tell you, I have a favour to ask."

"A favour!—yes, my dear."

"Yes, father, a favour; but what I desire is so singular—coming from a girl—that I really do not know how to make my request, although the thought is perfectly clear in my mind."

"Oh, oh, little maid," the Marquis said, with a smile, though he was much affected, "what is this thing which requires such mighty preparations? It must be very terrible for you to hesitate so in revealing it to me."

"No, father, it is not terrible; but, I repeat, it will appear to you wild."

"Oh, my child," he continued, as he shrugged his shoulders with an air of resignation, "I have seen so many wild things for some time past, that I shall not attach any importance to one now; hence you can explain yourself fully, without fearing any blame from me."

"Listen to me, father; the favour I have

to ask of you is this—and, in the first place, you must promise to grant it to me.”

“Caramba!” he said, good-humouredly, “you are taking your precautions, *senorita*. And suppose that I refuse?”

“In that case, father, all would be at an end,” she replied, sorrowfully.

“Come, my child, reassure yourself: I pledge you my word, which you ask for so peremptorily. Are you satisfied now?”

“Oh, father, how kind you are! You really mean it now? You pledge your word to grant me what I ask of you?”

“Yes, yes, little obstinate, I do pledge my word.”

The girl danced with delight, as she clapped her pretty little hands, and warmly embraced her father.

“On my word, this little girl is mad!” the Marquis said, with a smile.

“Yes, father, mad with delight; for I hope soon to prove to you that your fortune has never been more flourishing than it now is.”

“Why, her mind is wandering now.”

“No, father,” said Don Ruiz, who, with

his eyes fixed on his sister, was listening with sustained interest, and was attentively following the play of her flexible face, on which the varied emotions that agitated her were reflected; "I believe, on the contrary, that Marianna is at this moment revolving in her mind some strange scheme, for carrying out which she requires full and entire liberty."

"You have read the truth, Ruiz. Yes, I have a great project in my head; but in order that it may be thoroughly successful, I must be mistress of my actions, without control or remarks, from eight o'clock this evening till midnight. Do you grant me this power, father?"

"I have promised it," Don Hernando replied, with a smile. "A gentleman has only his word; as you desire, from eight o'clock till midnight you will be sole mistress of the hacienda: no one, not even myself, will have the right to make a remark about your conduct. Must I announce this officially to our people?" he added, sportively.

"It is unnecessary, father; only two persons need be told."

"And who are these two privileged persons, if you please?"

"My foster-brother Marianno, the tigrero, and José Paredes."

"Come, I see you know where to place your confidence. Those two men are entirely devoted to us, and this gives me trust in the future. Go on, my child; what must be done further?"

"These men must be provided with picks, spades, crow-bars, and lanterns."

"I see you are thinking about digging."

"Possibly," she said, with a smile.

"Stories about buried treasure are thoroughly worn out in this country, my child," he said, with a dubious shake of his head; "all those that have been buried were dug up long ago."

"I can offer you no explanation, father. You are ignorant of my plan, and hence cannot argue upon a matter you do not know: moreover, you must make no remarks, and be the first to obey me," she said, with an exquisite smile. "You ought not to give an example of rebellion to my new subjects."

"That is perfectly true, my dear child;

I am in the wrong, and offer you an ample apology. Be good enough to go on with your instructions."

"I have only a word to add, father. You and Ruiz must also provide yourselves with tools, for I expect you all four to work."

"Oh, oh, that is rather hard—not on me who am young," Don Ruiz exclaimed, laughingly, "but on our father. Come, little sister, do not expect such toil from him."

"I may have to lend a hand myself," Donna Marianna replied. "Believe me, Don Ruiz, you should not treat this affair lightly; it is far more serious than you suppose, and the consequences will be of incalculable importance for my father and the honour of our name. In my turn I will take an oath, since you refuse to believe my word."

"Not I, sister."

"Yes, Ruiz, you doubt it, although you do not like to allow it. Well, I swear to you and my father, by all I hold dearest in the world—that is to say, you two—that I am perfectly well aware of what I am doing, and am certain of success."

Such enthusiasm sparkled in the girl's

brilliant eyes, there was such an expression of sincerity in her accent, that the two gentlemen at length confessed themselves vanquished; her conviction had entered their minds, and they were persuaded.

"What you desire shall be done, daughter," Don Hernando said; "and, whatever the result may be, I shall feel grateful to you for the efforts you are making."

Don Ruiz, by his father's orders, warned the majordomo and the tigrero, who was already preparing to return to the rancho. But so soon as the young man knew that his presence was necessary at the hacienda, he remained without the slightest remark, and delighted at having an opportunity to prove to his masters how greatly he was devoted to them. Then what always happens under similar circumstances occurred: while Donna Marianna was calmly awaiting the hour she had herself fixed for action, the Marquis and his son, on the other hand, suffered from a feverish curiosity, which did not allow them a moment's rest, and made them regard the delay as interminable. At length eight o'clock struck.

"It is time!" said Donna Marianna.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE HUERTA.

ALL southern nations are fond of shade, flowers, and birds; and as the heat of the climate compels them, so to speak, to live in the open air, they have arranged their gardens with a degree of comfort unknown among us. The Italians and Spaniards, whose houses, during the greater part of the year, are only inhabitable for a few hours a day, have striven to make their gardens veritable oases, where they can breathe the fresh evening air without being annoyed by those myriads of mosquitoes and gnats unknown in temperate climates, but which in tropical latitudes are a real plague. At mid-day they may be seen wheeling in countless myriads in every sun-beam. The Hispano-Americans especially

have raised the gardening art to a science, being always engaged in trying to solve the problem of procuring fresh air during the hottest hours of the day—that is to say, between mid-day and three P.M., during which time the earth, which has been heated since dawn by the burning heat of a torrid sun, exhales deadly effluvia, and so decomposes the air that it is impossible to breathe it.

The Spanish language, which is so rich in expressions of every description, has two words to signify a garden. There is the word *garden*, by which is meant the parterre properly so called—the garden in which flowers are cultivated that in those countries grow in the open air, but with us only in hothouses, where they are stunted and decrepit; and, secondly, the *huerta*, which means the kitchen-garden, the vineyard, and their clumps of trees, wide avenues, cascades, streams, and lakes—in a word, all that we, very improperly in my opinion, have agreed to call a park. The Hacienda del Toro possessed a *huerta*, which the Marquises de Moguer had in turn sought to embellish. This *huerta*, which in Europe

would have seemed very large—for life among us has been reduced to the conditions of a mean and shabby comfort—was considered small in that country. It contained in all only thirty acres—that is to say, a surface of about twelve square miles; but this relative smallness was made up for by an admirable disposition of the ground, and an extent of shade, which had made a great reputation for the Huerta del Toro throughout Sonora.

At eight o'clock precisely the curfew was rung, as was the custom at the hacienda. At the sound of the chapel-bell all the peons and vaqueros retired to their jacals in order to sleep. Paredes had placed sentinels at night on the walls ever since an attack from the Indians had been apprehended, and the precaution was the more necessary at this time, as there was no moon, and it is that period of the month which the red-skins always select to begin their invasions. When the majordomo had assured himself that the sentries were at their posts, he made a general inspection of the whole hacienda to have the lights extinguished, and then proceeded, accompanied by the

tigrero, to the Blue Room, where Don Hernando and his son and daughter were assembled.

"All is in order, *mi amo*," he said; "everybody has retired to his jacal, the hacienda gates are closed, and the sentries placed on the walls."

"You are quite certain, Paredes, that no one is walking about the corrals or huerta?"

"No one; I made my rounds with the greatest strictness."

"Very good; now, daughter, you can give your orders, and we are ready to obey you."

Donna Marianna bowed to her father with a smile.

"Paredes," she said, "have you procured the tools my brother ordered you to provide?"

"Nina," he answered, "I have placed six picks, six crow-bars, and six spades in a clump of carob trees at the entrance of the large flower-garden."

"Why such a number of tools?" she asked, laughingly.

"Because, *senorita*, some may break; the

work we have to do must be performed quickly, and had I not taken this precaution, we might have met with delay."

"You are right. Follow me, senors."

"And the lanterns?" Don Ruiz observed.

"We will take them with us, but not light them till we reach the spot whither I am taking you. Although the night is dark, with your knowledge of localities we shall be able to guide ourselves without difficulty through the darkness. Our lights might be seen and arouse suspicions, and that is what we must avoid most of all."

"Excellently reasoned, daughter."

Donna Marianna rose, and the four men followed her in silence. They crossed the apartments instead of passing through the *patios*, which were thronged with sleepers, and entered the *huerta* by large double doors, from which the garden was reached by a flight of steps. On leaving the Blue Room Donna Marianna took the precaution to blow out the candles, so that the hacienda was plunged into complete darkness, and all appeared asleep. The night was very dark; the sky, in which not a single star twinkled, seemed an immense pall; the breeze whistled

hoarsely through the trees, whose branches rustled with an ill-omened murmur. In the distance could be heard the snapping bark of the coyotes, and at times the melancholy hoot of the owl arose in the dark; and broke the mournful silence which brooded over nature. This night was excellently chosen for a mysterious expedition of such a nature as Donna Marianna was about to attempt.

After an instant—not of hesitation, for the maiden, although her heart was beating loudly, was firm and resolute—but of reflection, Donna Marianna rapidly descended the steps and entered the garden, closely followed by the four men, who also experienced an internal emotion for which they could not account. They had gone but a few yards when they halted; they had reached the thicket in which the tools were concealed. The majordomo and the tigrero took them on their shoulders, while the Marquis and his son carried the lanterns. In spite of the darkness, which was rendered even more intense by the dense shadow cast by the old trees in the huerta, the young lady rapidly advanced, scarce

making the sand creak beneath her little feet, and following the winding walks with as much ease as if she were traversing them in the bright sunshine.

The Marquis and his son felt their curiosity increase from moment to moment. They saw the girl so gay, and so sure of herself, that they involuntarily began to hope, although they found it impossible to explain the nature of their hopes to themselves. Paredes and Marianno were also greatly puzzled about the purpose of the expedition in which they were taking part; but their thoughts did not travel beyond this: they supposed that there was some work for them to do, and that was all.

The young lady still walked on, stopping at times and muttering a few words in a low voice, as if trying to remember the instructions she had previously received, but never hesitating, or taking one walk for another; in a word, she did not once retrace her steps when she had selected her course. Night, especially when it is dark, imparts to scenery a peculiar hue, which completely changes the appearance of the most familiar spots; it gives the smallest object a formid-

able aspect; all is confounded in one mass, without graduated tints, from which nothing stands out: a spot which is very cheerful in the sunshine becomes gloomy and mournful when enveloped in darkness. The huerta, which was so pretty and bright by day, assumed on this night the gloomy and majestic proportions of a forest; the fall of a leaf, the accidental breaking of a branch, the dull murmur of invisible waters—things so unimportant in themselves—made these men start involuntarily, although they were endowed with great energy, and any real danger would not have made them blench.

But darkness possesses the fatal influence over the human organization of lessening its faculties, and rendering it small and paltry. A man who, in the midst of a battle, electrified by the sound of the cannon, intoxicated by the smell of powder, and excited by the example of his comrades, performs prodigies of valour, will tremble like a child on finding himself alone in the shadow of night, and in the presence of an unknown object, which causes him to apprehend a danger which frequently only exists

in his sickly imagination. Hence our friends involuntarily underwent the formidable influence of darkness, and felt a certain uneasiness, which they tried in vain to combat, and which they could not succeed in entirely dispelling, in spite of all their efforts. They walked on silent and gloomy, pressing against each other, looking around them timidly, and in their hearts wishing to reach as speedily as possible the end of this long walk. At length Donna Marianna halted.

"Light the lanterns," she said.

This was the first remark made since they left the Blue Room. The lanterns were instantly lighted. Donna Marianna took one, and handed another to her brother.

"Show me a light, Ruiz," she said to him.

The spot where they found themselves was situated at nearly the centre of the huerta; it was a species of grass-plot, on which only stubbly, stunted grass grew. In the centre rose a sort of tumulus, formed of several rocks piled on one another without any apparent symmetry, and which the owners of the hacienda had always respected

in consequence of its barbarous singularity. An old tradition asserted that one of the old kings of Cibola, on the ruins of which town the hacienda was built, had been buried at the spot, which was called "The Tomb of the Cacique" after the tradition, whether it were true or false. The first Marquis de Moguer, who was a very pious man, like all the Spanish conquistadors, had to some extent authorized this belief, by having the mound blessed by a priest, under the pretext—a very plausible one at that time—that the tomb of a pagan attracted demons, who would at once retire when it was consecrated.

With the exception of the name it bore, this mound had never been held in bad repute, and no suspicious legend was attached to it. It was remote from the buildings of the hacienda, and surrounded on all sides by dense and almost impenetrable clumps of trees. Persons very rarely visited it, because, as it stood in the centre of an open patch of grass, it offered no shelter against the sun; hence the place was only known to the family and their oldest servants.

"Ah! ah!" said the Marquis, "so you have brought us to the cacique's tomb, my girl?"

"Yes, father; we can now begin operations without fear of being seen."

"I greatly fear that your hopes have led you astray."

"You promised, father, to make no remarks."

"That is true, and so I will hold my tongue."

"Very good, father," she said, with a smile; "be assured that this exemplary docility will soon be duly rewarded."

And the young lady continued her investigations. She looked attentively at every stone, seeming to study its position carefully, while comparing it with a point of the compass.

"In which direction does the clump of old aloes lie?" she at length asked.

"That I cannot tell you," said Don Ruiz.

"With your permission, I will do so," Paredes observed.

"Yes, yes," she said, eagerly.

"The majordomo looked about for a moment, and then, placing himself in a certain direction, said,—

"The aloes of Cibola, as we call them, are just facing me."

"Are you certain of it, Paredes?"

"Yes, nina, I am."

The young lady immediately placed herself by the majordomo's side, and bending down over the stones, examined them with extreme care and attention. At length she drew herself up with a start of joy.

"My father," she said, with emotion, "the honour of dealing the first stroke belongs to you."

"Very good, my child; where am I to strike?"

"There!" she said, pointing to a rather large gap between two stones.

Don Hernando drove in the pick, and, pressing on it forcibly, detached a stone, which rolled on the grass.

"Very good," said the girl. "Now stop, father, and let these young men work; you can join them presently, should it prove necessary. Come, Ruiz—come, tocayo—

come, Paredes—to work, my friends! Enlarge this hole, and make it large enough for us to pass through.”

The three men set to work ardently, excited by Donna Marianna's words, and soon the stones, leaping from their bed of earth, began to strew the ground around in large numbers. Not one of the three men suspected the nature of the task he was performing, and yet such is the attraction of a secret, that they drove in their picks with extraordinary ardour. Ruiz alone possibly foresaw an important discovery behind this task, but could not have explained what its nature was. The work, in the meanwhile, progressed; the hole became with every moment larger. The stones, which had been apparently thrown upon each other, were not bound by any mortar, and hence, so soon as the first was removed, the others came out with extreme facility. Now and then the labourers stopped to draw breath; but this interruption lasted only a short time, so anxious were they to obtain the solution of the problem. All at once they stopped in discouragement, for an enormous mass of rock resisted their efforts. This

rock, which was about six feet square, was exactly under the stones they had previously removed, and as no solution of continuity could be perceived, everything led to the supposition that this rock was really very much larger, and that only a portion of it was laid bare.

"Why are you stopping, brother?" Donna Marianna asked.

"Because we have reached the rock, and should break our picks, without getting any further."

"What! reached the rock? Impossible!"

The Marquis leant over the excavation.

"It would be madness to try and get any further," he said; "it is plain that we have reached the rock."

Donna Marianna gave an angry start.

"I tell you again that it is impossible," she continued.

"Look for yourself, sister."

The young lady took a lantern and looked; then, without answering her brother, she turned to Paredes and the tigrero.

"You," she said, "are old servants of the family, and I can order you without any

fear of being contradicted; so obey me. Remove, as rapidly as possible, all the stones round that supposed rock, and when that is done, I fancy I shall convince the most incredulous."

The two men resumed work; and Don Ruiz, piqued by his sister's remark, imitated them. The Marquis, with folded arms and head bowed on his chest, was overcome by such persistency, and began to hope again. Ere long the stones were removed, and the mass of rock stood solitary.

The young lady turned to the Marquis.

"Father," she said to him, "you dealt the first blow, and must deal the last; help these three men in removing this block."

Without replying, the Marquis seized a pick, and placed himself by the side of the workers. The four men dug their tools into the friable earth which adhered to the rock; then, with a common and gradual effort, they began raising the stone until it suddenly lost its balance, toppled over, and fell on the ground, revealing a deep excavation. At the sight of this all uttered a cry of surprise.

"Burn some wood to purify the air," the young lady said.

They obeyed with that feverish activity which, in great circumstances, seizes on apparently the slowest natures.

"Now come, father," Donna Marianna said, as she seized a lantern and boldly entered the excavation.

The Marquis went in, and the rest followed him. After proceeding for about one hundred yards along a species of gallery, they perceived the body of a man, lying on a sort of clumsy dais, in a perfect state of preservation, and rather resembling a sleeping person than a corpse. Near the body the fleshless bones of another person were scattered on the ground.

"Look!" said the maiden.

"Yes," the Marquis answered, "it is the body interred under the tumulus."

"You are mistaken, father; it is the body of a miner, and the fancied tumulus is nothing but a very rich gold mine, which has remained for ages under the guard of this insensate body, and which it has pleased Heaven to make known to you, in order that you may recover the fortune which you

were on the point of losing. Look around you," she said, raising the lantern.

The Marquis uttered a cry of delight and admiration; doubt was no longer possible. All around he saw enormous veins of gold, easy of extraction almost without labour. The Marquis was dazzled; weaker in joy than in suffering, he fell unconscious on the floor of this mine, whose produce was about to restore him all that he had lost.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE ASSAULT ON QUITOVER.

WHILE these events were taking place at the Hacienda del Toro, others of an even more important nature were being carried out at the Real de Minas. Kidd, the adventurer, had scarce left Don Rufino Contreras, after the interesting conversations we have recorded, ere the senator made his preparations for departure, and at once set out for the Real de Minas, though careful to be accompanied by a respectable escort, which protected him from the insults of marauders. At eight A.M. of the following day the senator entered the pueblo, and his first business was to present himself to the town commandant, Don Marcos de Niza. The captain not only received him coldly, but with a certain amount of constraint.

This did not escape the senator's quick eye, but he was not at all affected by it.

"My dear captain," he said, after the usual compliments, "I am pleased at having been selected by the Presidential Government as its delegate to the military authorities of the State of Sonora for two reasons, apart from the honour I shall acquire by accomplishing this confidential duty."

The captain bowed, but said nothing.

"The first of these reasons, the senator continued, with his eternal smile, "is that I make the acquaintance of an excellent caballero in yourself; the second, that before being joined in the command with you, and desiring to make myself as agreeable to you as I could, I asked for the rank of lieutenant-colonel for you, a step which, between ourselves, you have long deserved, and I was so fortunate as to obtain it for you. Permit me to hand you the commission with my own hands."

And drawing from his pocket-book a large folded paper, he laid it in the hand which the captain mechanically held out. The senator had justly counted on this skillfully managed surprise. The captain, con-

founded by the tardy justice done him, could not find a word to answer, but from this moment Don Rufino's cause was gained in his mind; and unless some unforeseen event occurred, the senator was convinced that he had nothing now to fear from this man, whom he had cleverly managed to lay under an obligation, without it costing him anything. The truth was, that a few days previously the captain's nomination had reached the Governor of Arispe from Mexico; the senator accidentally heard of it, and offered to deliver it to the captain. As the governor had no reason to refuse, he entrusted the nomination to the senator, and he turned it to the good purpose we have seen.

"And now," he continued, cutting short the thanks which the new colonel thought himself bound to offer him, "permit me to change the conversation, my dear colonel, and speak to you about things which interest me privately."

"I am listening to you, caballero," Don Marcos answered; "and if I can be of any service to you——"

"Oh, merely to give me some information,"

the senator interrupted him; "I will explain the matter in two words. I am, as you are probably aware, very intimate with a relative of yours, the Marquis de Moguer, and an alliance between us is being arranged at this moment."

Don Marcos gave a deep bow.

"Now," the senator continued, "the Marquis, as you of course know, has been seriously tried of late; in a word, between ourselves, he is almost ruined. Several times already I have been so fortunate as to render him important services; but, as you know, where misfortune is pressing a family, the best intentions often can only succeed in retarding an inevitable downfall. Being most desirous to save a man with whom I shall be probably closely connected within a few days, not merely by the ties of friendship, but also by the closer links of relationship, I have bought up all his debts; in a word, I have become his sole creditor, and that is as much as telling you that the Marquis does not owe a farthing now. The man whom I entrusted with this difficult negotiation will arrive immediately in this town, where I gave him the meeting."

"He arrived some days ago," the colonel remarked.

"Indeed!" Don Rufino exclaimed, affecting surprise; "it seems in that case that he has worked quicker than I expected. But that is a thousand times better, as I will claim a service at your hands."

"A service!" Don Marcos exclaimed, with instinctive distrust.

"Yes," the senator continued, tranquilly; "I hardly know how to explain it to you, for it is so difficult, however friendly you may be with a man whose daughter you are about to marry, to say to him, 'You owed enormous sums; I have bought up your debts, here are the receipts; burn them, for you owe nothing now:' it would be looking so much like trying to impose conditions to act thus—in a word, to make a bargain—that I feel a repugnance from it; and if a common friend does not consent to come to my assistance in the matter, I confess to you that I am completely ignorant how I shall get out of the difficulty."

"What!" the colonel exclaimed, in admiration, "would you do that?"

"I never had any other thought," the senator replied, simply.

"Oh, it is a great and generous action, caballero."

"Not at all; on the contrary, it is quite natural. Don Hernando is my intimate friend; I am going to marry his daughter, and my line of duty is plain. I only did what any one else in my place would have done."

"No, no," Don Marcos said, shaking his head with an air of conviction; "no, senor, no one would have acted as you have done, I feel certain. Alas! hearts like yours are rare."

"All the worse, all the worse, and I feel sorry for humanity," Don Rufino said, as he raised his eyes piously to the ceiling.

"What is the service you expect from me, senor?"

"A very simple thing. I will give you in a few moments these unlucky receipts, which I will ask you to be kind enough to hand to the Marquis. You can make him understand better than I can the purity of my intentions in this affair; and, above all, pray assure him that I have not done it for

the purpose of forcing him to give me his daughter's hand."

The senator went away, leaving the colonel completely under the charm. He proceeded hastily to the meson where Don Parfindo was lodged; he took the receipts from him, rewarded him handsomely, and did not leave him till he saw him and his bailiff out of the pueblo; then he walked slowly back to the colonel's house, rubbing his hands, and muttering, with an ironical smile—

"I fancy that I shall soon have no cause to fear that worthy Senor Kidd's denunciations. By the bye, where can he be? his absence from Quitovar is not natural, and I must free myself from him at our next interview."

The senator's conversation with his agent had occupied some time, and when Don Rufino returned to the colonel's house, he found the latter busy in making known his new rank to his officers. The colonel eagerly took advantage of the opportunity to introduce the senator to them, and to tell them that Don Rufino was delegated by the Government to watch the operations of the

army, and that hence they must obey him like himself. The officers bowed respectfully to the senator, made their vows, and retired. When the two gentlemen were alone again, the ice was completely broken between them, and they were the best friends in the world.

"Well?" the colonel asked.

"All is settled," the senator replied, as he produced the vouchers.

"Caramba! you have lost no time."

"The best things are those done quickly. Take all these documents, and make what use of them you think proper. I am delighted at having got rid of them."

While saying this, Don Rufino threw the papers on the table with an excellent affectation of delight.

"With your leave, caballero," the colonel said, with a laugh, "I will take these papers, since you insist on it, but I will give you a receipt."

"Oh, no," the senator exclaimed, "that would spoil the whole business."

"Still——"

"Not a word," he interrupted him, quickly; "I do not wish to have in my

possession the shadow of a claim upon Don Hernando."

The colonel would have probably pressed the point, had not a great noise been heard in the anteroom, and a man rushed into the colonel's sanctum, shouting at the top of his lungs, "The Indians! the Indians!"

The colonel and the senator rose. The man was Kidd; his clothes were torn and disordered; his face and hands were covered with blood and dust, and all apparently proved that he had just escaped from a sharp pursuit. A strange uproar outside the house, which soon assumed formidable proportions, corroborated his statement.

"Is that you, Kidd?" the colonel exclaimed.

"Yes," he replied; "but lose no time, captain; here are the pagans! they are at my heels, and I am scarce half-an-hour ahead of them."

Without waiting to hear anything more, the colonel dashed out of the room.

"Where have you come from?" Don Rufino asked the bandit, so soon as he was alone with him.

The latter gave a start of disappointment

on recognising the senator, whom he had not noticed at the first moment. This start did not escape Don Rufino.

"How does that concern you?" the adventurer answered, roughly.

"I want to know."

Kidd made a meaning grimace.

"Every man has his own business," he said.

"Some treachery you have been preparing, of course."

"That is possible," he replied, with a knowing grin.

"Against me, perhaps."

"Who knows?"

"Will you speak?"

"What is the use of speaking, since you have guessed it?"

"Then you are still trying to deceive me?"

"I mean to take my precautions, that is all."

"Scoundrel!" the senator exclaimed, with a menacing gesture.

"Nonsense!" the other said, with a shrug of his shoulders; "I am not

afraid of you, for you would not dare kill me."

"Why not?"

"In the first place, because it would cause a row, and because I do not think you such a friend of the captain that you venture to take such a liberty in his house."

"You are mistaken, villain, and you shall have a proof of it."

"Holloa!" the adventurer exclaimed, as he retired precipitately to the door.

But, with a gesture rapid as thought, Don Rufino seized one of Don Marcos's pistols, cocked it, and ere Kidd could effect the retreat he was meditating, he fired, and the adventurer lay on the ground with a bullet in his chest.

"Die, brigand!" the senator shouted, as he threw down the weapon he had used.

"Yes," the bandit muttered, "but not unavenged. It was well played, master; but your turn will soon arrive——"

And stiffening with a final convulsion, the ruffian expired, retaining on his features even after death an expression of mocking defiance, which caused the senator an involuntary tremor.

"What is the matter here?" the colonel asked, suddenly entering.

"Nothing very important," Don Rufino said, carelessly. "I was carried away by my passion, and settled this scoundrel."

"*Viva Dios!* You were right, senor; I only regret that you have anticipated me, for I have proofs of his treachery.—Ho, there! Remove this carrion, and throw it out," he shouted to some soldiers who accompanied him, and had remained in the ante-room.

The soldiers obeyed, and the adventurer's body was thrown unceremoniously into the street.

"Are the Indians really coming up?"

"The dust raised by their horses' hoofs can already be perceived. We have not a moment to lose in preparing for defence. I suppose I can reckon on you?"

"*Rayo de Rios!* I should hope so."

"Come, then, for time presses."

Kidd had in reality prepared, with his usual Machiavelism, a new treachery, of which, unluckily for him, he was destined to be the first victim. The whole pueblo was in an uproar: the streets were crowded with

soldiers proceeding to their posts; with women, children, and aged persons flying in terror; with rancheros, who arrived at a gallop to find shelter in the town, and heightened the general alarm by the terror depicted on their faces: cattle were dashing madly about the streets, deserted by their herds, who were compelled to proceed to the entrenchments; and on the distant plain the body of Indians could be seen through the dust-clouds, coming up at headlong speed.

"They are numerous," the senator whispered to the colonel.

"Too many," the latter answered; "but silence! let us look cheerful."

There were twenty minutes of indescribable anxiety, during which the defenders of the pueblo were enabled to examine their enemies, and form an idea of the terrible danger that menaced them.

Unhappily, the sun was on the point of setting, and it was evident that the redskins had calculated their march so as to arrive exactly at that moment, and continue the attack through the night. The colonel, foreseeing that he might possibly be com-

pelled to have recourse to flight, collected a band of fifty resolute horsemen, whom he gave orders not to leave the Plaza Major, and be ready for any eventuality. After their first charge the Indians retired out of musket range, and did not renew their attack. A few horsemen, better mounted than the rest, were scattered over the plain, picking up the dead and wounded, and capturing the straggling horses; but the colonel gave orders that they should not be fired at—not through humanity, but in order to spare his ammunition, of which he possessed a very small stock.

Night set in, and a deep gloom covered the earth; but the red-skins lit no fires. This circumstance alarmed the colonel; but several hours passed, and nothing led to the possibility of an attack being suspected. Profound silence brooded over the pueblo and the surrounding plains, and the Indians seemed to have disappeared as if by enchantment. The Mexicans tried in vain to distinguish any suspicious forms in the darkness; they saw and heard nothing. This expectation of a danger, which all felt to be im-

minent and terrible, had something frightful for the besieged.

Suddenly an immense light lit up the plain ; the black outlines of the Indians rose like diabolical apparitions, galloping in all directions ; a horrible, discordant, and shrill yell echoed in the ears of the Mexicans, and clouds of blazing arrows fell upon them from all sides at once, while the hideous heads of the red-skins appeared on the crest of the entrenchments. Then, in the light of a forest, kindled by the Indians to serve them as a beacon, an obstinate hand-to-hand fight began between the white men and red-skins.

The pueblo was captured ; any further resistance became not only impossible, but insensate. Several houses were already ablaze, and in a few minutes the Real de Minas would only be one immense furnace. The senator and the colonel had fought bravely so long as a gleam of hope was left them and the struggle appeared possible. At this moment they thought of saving the few wretches who still existed, and had escaped the frightful massacre by a miracle. Collect-

ing around them all the men they possessed, they dashed to the Plaza Major, where, in spite of the fight raging around them, the squadron picked by Don Marcos had remained motionless, and leaping on their horses, they gave the order to start. Then the little band rushed forward like a hurricane, overthrowing and crushing all the obstacles that stood in their way ; and after losing one-third their number, the rest succeeded in leaving the pueblo, traversing the enemy's lines, and taking the road to the Hacienda del Toro, without any close pursuit.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE VENGEANCE OF HEAVEN.

THE Marquis's faint lasted but a short time, thanks to the attentions his son and daughter paid him. He had scarce regained his senses ere he drew Donna Marianna gently to him.

"My dear child," he muttered, as he pressed her to his heart, "you are our saviour."

The girl, delighted with this praise, freed herself, with a blush, from her father's embrace.

"Then," she said, with a pretty toss of her head, "you now allow, I think, father, that I have really kept my word."

"Oh, my child," he said with much emotion, as he looked around him in delight,

"there are here fifty fortunes equal to the one I have lost."

The girl clapped her hands in delight.

"Ah, how happy I am! I felt certain that she would not deceive me."

This remark, which escaped from the fulness of Donna Marianna's heart, struck Don Hernando.

"To whom are you alluding, daughter? and who is this person who inspires you with such confidence?"

"The one who revealed the existence of this treasure to me, father," she answered.

The Marquis did not press her.

"Marianno," he said to the tigrero, "you will pass the night here; allow no one to approach this excavation, for it would be imprudent to let strangers know of the existence of such a treasure before we have time to take certain precautions indispensable for its safety."

"You can go without fear, *mi amo*," the brave lad answered; "no one shall approach the mine while I am alive."

"Besides," Don Hernando continued, "your watch will cease at sunrise."

"As long as you please, *mi amo*."

And the tigrero, collecting the tools and lanterns, installed himself in the excavation itself, a few yards from the body still lying on the daïs. The other four slowly returned to the hacienda, conversing about this marvellous discovery, which, at the moment when all seemed desperate, saved the family. In fact, the gold veins were so rich, that it would be possible to detach in a single day enough nearly to cover all the debts contracted by the Marquis. They re-entered the blue-room; and though it was very late, not one of them felt the slightest inclination to sleep; on the contrary, they wanted still to converse about the mine.

"Well," the Marquis said, "you did not dream that so rich a mine existed on the estate; you allowed as much just now."

"In truth, father, some one was kind enough to give me the information by which I found it."

"But who can this person be, who is better acquainted than myself with a property which has been in the hands of the family more than three hundred years, and yet nobody suspected that it contained this treasure?"

"The probability is that the secret was well kept, father."

"Of course; but by whom?"

"By the old owners of the soil, of course."

"Nonsense! you are jesting, daughter. Those poor Indians disappeared long ago from the face of the earth."

"I am not of that opinion, father," Don Ruiz observed.

"The more so," Paredes struck in, "because I know for a fact that the tribe to which you allude still exists; it is one of the most powerful in the great confederation of the Papazos."

"And you know, father, with what religious exactitude the Indians preserve secrets confided to their conscience."

"That is true; but in that case some man must have spoken."

"Or some woman," Donna Marianna said, smilingly.

"Well, be it so—a woman," the Marquis continued; "that is already a valuable piece of news. I know that you have obtained your information about the mine from a woman, my child."

"Unhappily, father, I am prohibited from saying any more."

"Humph! prohibited!"

"Yes, father. However, reassure yourself: this mine is really yours—your lawful property; its owner has freely surrendered it in your favour."

Don Hernando frowned with an air of dissatisfaction.

"Charity!" he muttered.

"Oh no, but a gift you can accept, father, I swear to you. Besides, the person to whom you are indebted for it promised me to make herself known to you ere long."

On the next morning, by the orders of the Marquis, the majordomo selected ten confidential rancheros and peons from those who had sought shelter at the hacienda, and the work began at once. The mine had been abandoned exactly in the state in which it was when the body of the miner was found by the Indians; hence the mere sweepings formed a considerable amount, and at the expiration of four or five days the sum collected was sufficient, not only to pay off all the debts, but also to leave at the disposal of the Marquis a sum thrice as

large as he owed. With the exception of the legitimate anxiety caused by the apprehension of an Indian attack, joy had returned to the hacienda; the Marquis had begun to smile again, and seemed younger—so great is the privilege of wealth to alter men. The first thought that occurred to the Marquis was to settle with his creditors and determine his position.

“My dear child,” he said one evening to Donna Marianna, at the moment when she was about to retire for the night, “you have not yet given me an answer on the subject of Don Rufino Contrera’s request for your hand; but the week has long passed. To-morrow, Paredes is going to start to place in his hands certain letters of importance for the settlement of my affairs, and I wish to take advantage of the opportunity. What answer shall I give Don Rufino?”

The young lady blushed; but at length, subduing the trouble that agitated her, she said, with a slight tremor in her voice,—

“Father, I am doubtless highly honoured by this caballero’s demand; but do you not

think as I do, that the moment is badly chosen for such a thing, menaced as we incessantly are by terrible dangers?"

"Very good, daughter; I do not at all wish to force your inclinations. I will answer the senator in that sense; but if he come himself to seek his answer, what shall we do?"

"It will be time enough to think of it then," she replied, with a laugh.

"Well, well, that is true, and I was wrong to dwell on the matter so. Good night, my child, and sleep soundly. As for me, I shall probably spend the whole night in my study with your brother, engaged with accounts."

The young lady withdrew.

"Senor Marquis," said Paredes, suddenly opening the door, "excuse my disturbing you so late; but Marianno, the tigrero, has just arrived at the hacienda with his whole family; he is the bearer of such strange and terrible news, that you will perhaps sooner hear it from his lips than from mine."

"What does he say?" Don Ruiz asked, who entered the room at this moment.

"He says that the Indians have risen, that they have surprised the Mineral of Quitovar, fired the pueblo, and massacred all the inhabitants."

"Oh, that is frightful!" the Marquis exclaimed.

"Our poor cousin!" the young man added.

"That is true; our unhappy cousin commanded at the pueblo. What a horrible disaster! Send the tigrero in to me, Paredes; go and fetch him at once."

Marianno was shown in, and related in their fullest details, though with some exaggeration, the events recorded in our last chapter, which threw his hearers into a profound stupor. Among all the incomprehensible things which daily occur, there is one which will never be explained; it is the rapidity with which all news spreads even for considerable distances. Thus, the capture of Quitovar was unhappily only too true, and the details furnished by Marianno were substantially correct; but how could the tigrero have become acquainted with a fact that had happened scarce three hours previously, and at more than ten leagues

from the hacienda? He could not have explained this himself; he had heard it from somebody, but could not remember whom.

This terrible news caused the Marquis to reflect deeply. Now that the roads were, probably infested with marauders, and communication intercepted by the Indians, he could not think of sending Paredes to Hermosillo, and the journey had become literally impossible. He must busy himself without delay in organizing the defence of the hacienda, in order vigorously to repulse the attack which would, in all probability, not be long delayed. In spite of the advanced hour, all were at work in an instant at the Toro; the walls were lined with defenders, and reserves established in all parts of the hacienda.

The whole night was spent in preparations. About two hours after sunrise, at the moment when the Marquis, wearied by a long watch, was preparing to take a little repose, the sentries signalled the approach of a body of horsemen, coming at full gallop towards the hacienda. The Marquis went up on the walls, took a telescope, and had a

look at them. After a short examination, he perceived that these horsemen were Mexicans, although, owing to the distance, he could not distinguish whether they were soldiers or rancheros. Still, he had all preparations made to give them a hearty reception, if they evinced a desire to halt at the hacienda, as the direction they were following seemed to indicate.

Some time elapsed ere these horsemen, who were climbing the hill, reached the hacienda gates. Then all doubts were removed: they were soldiers, and a few paces ahead of the troop rode Don Rufino Contreras and Colonel Don Marcos de Niza. But both leaders and soldiers were in such disorder, so blackened with gunpowder, so covered with dust and blood, that it was plain they had come from a recent fight, from which they had escaped as fugitives. Men and horses were utterly exhausted, not alone by the extraordinary fatigue they had undergone, but also by the gigantic struggle they had sustained ere they dreamed of flight. It was unnecessary to ask them any questions. The Marquis

ordered refreshments to be served them, and beds got ready.

Don Marcos de Niza and the senator had hardly the strength to say a few words explanatory of the wretched condition in which they presented themselves, and yielding to fatigue and want of sleep, they fell down in a state of complete insensibility, from which no attempt was made to rouse them, but they were both carried to bed. The Marquis then withdrew to his room, leaving his son to watch over the safety of the hacienda in his stead, for in all probability it would be speedily invested by the red-skins.

At three in the afternoon a fresh band of horsemen was signalled in the plain. This considerable party was composed entirely of hunters and wood-rangers. Don Ruiz gave orders to let them advance, for the arrival of these hunters, nearly one hundred in number, was a piece of good fortune for the hacienda, as the number of its defenders was augmented by so many. Still, when Don Ruiz saw them enter the track, he noticed such a regularity in their move-

ments, that a doubt crossed his mind like a flash of lightning, and a thought of treachery rose to his brain. Hence he rushed to the outer gate of the hacienda to give Paredes orders not to open; but the majordomo checked him at the first word.

"You cannot have looked, nino," he said, "when you order such a thing."

"On the contrary, I do so because I have looked," he replied.

"Then you must have seen badly," the majordomo said; "otherwise you would have perceived that the horseman at their head is one of your most devoted friends."

"Whom do you mean?"

"Who else than Stronghand?"

"Is Stronghand coming with those horsemen?"

"He is at the head of the column, nino."

"Oh, in that case let them enter."

"Ah, I felt certain of it."

The hunters had no necessity even of parleying; they found the hacienda gates wide open, and rode straight in without drawing rein. Don Ruiz recognised Stronghand, who, on his side, rode up to him and held out his hand.

"Grant me one favour, Don Ruiz," he said.

"Speak," the young man answered.

"Two words of conversation in your sister's presence; but wait a moment, another person must accompany me, for reasons you will soon appreciate; this person desires temporarily to maintain the most inviolable incognito. Do you consent?"

Don Ruiz hesitated.

"What do you fear?" the hunter continued; "do you not put faith in me? Do you believe me capable of abusing your confidence?"

"No; I do not wish even to suppose it, I pledge you my word."

"And I mine, Don Ruiz."

"Act as you think proper."

The hunter gave a signal, and a horseman dismounted and came up to them. A long cloak entirely covered him, and the broad brim of his hat was pulled down over his eyes. He bowed silently to the young man, who, though greatly perplexed by this mystery, made no remark; and after requesting the majordomo to take care of the

new comers, he led his guests to the room in which Donna Marianna was seated, engaged with her tambour-work. The young lady, on hearing the door open, mechanically raised her eyes.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, joyfully, "Strong-hand!"

"Myself, senorita," the young man replied, with a respectful bow; "I have come to ask the fulfilment of your promise."

"I shall keep it, no matter what may happen."

"Thanks, senorita."

"Ruiz," she said to her brother, eagerly; "until further orders, my father must not know of the presence of these caballeros here."

"What you ask of me is very difficult, sister; think of the immense responsibility I assume in acting thus."

"I know it, Ruiz; but it must be, my dear brother, for my happiness is at stake," she continued, clasping her hands imploringly; "and besides, what have you to fear? Do you not know this hunter?"

"Yes, I know him; I am even under

great obligations to him; but his companion?"

"I answer for him, Ruiz."

"You know, then, who he is?"

"No matter what I know, brother; I only beg you to grant what I ask."

"Well, for your sake I will be silent."

"Oh! thanks, thanks, brother!"

At this moment a sound of footsteps was heard in the adjoining room.

"What is to be done?" the maiden murmured.

Stronghand laid his finger on his lips, and, leading away his companion—who, through the thick cloak he wore, resembled a phantom rather than a man—disappeared behind a curtain. At the same instant a door opened, and two persons entered. They were Don Marcos and the senator. They had scarce exchanged the first compliments with Don Ruiz and Donna Marianna, when the Marquis entered the room.

"You are up at last, I am happy to see," he said, cheerfully. "*Viva Dios!* you were in a most deplorable state on your

arrival; I am glad to see you so fully recovered."

"A thousand thanks, cousin, for your hospitality, of which we stood in great need."

"No more about that; I am the more pleased at the chance which has brought us together, Don Rufino, because I intended to write to you immediately."

"My dear sir," the senator said, with a bow.

"Are you not expecting an answer from me?"

"It is so, but I did not dare to hope."

The Marquis cut him short.

"Let us come to the most important point first," he continued, with a smile. "Don Rufino, you have behaved to me like a real friend. By a miracle—for I can only attribute to a miracle the good fortune that has befallen me—I am in a position to arrange my affairs, and discharge my debt to you, although, be assured, I shall never forget the services you have rendered me, and the obligations I have contracted toward you."

The senator was so surprised, that he

turned pale, and took a side glance at the colonel.

"Obligations far greater than you suppose," the latter said, warmly.

"What do you mean, cousin?" the Marquis asked, in surprise.

"I mean that Don Rufino, unaware of the happy change in your fortunes, and wishing to save you from the frightful position in which you were, had bought up all your liabilities, and so soon as he had all the vouchers in his possession, he hurried with them to me, and implored me to destroy them. "Here they are, cousin," he added, as he drew a bundle of papers from his pocket.

The various actors in this singular scene were affected by strange feelings. Don Ruiz and his sister exchanged a look of despair, for they understood that the Marquis would now be unable to refuse his consent to his daughter's marriage.

"Oh!" the Marquis exclaimed, "I cannot accept such an act of generosity."

"From a stranger, certainly not," Don Rufino remarked, in an insinuating voice; "but I flattered myself that I was not such to you, my dear sir."

There was a silence.

"What is going on at this moment is so strange; I feel taken so unawares," the Marquis presently continued; "my thoughts are so confused, that I must beg you, Don Rufino, to defer till to-morrow the remainder of this conversation. By that time I shall have been able to regain my coolness, and then, believe me, I will answer you in the way that I ought to do."

"My dear sir, I understand the delicacy of your remarks, and will wait as long as you think proper," the senator replied, with a bow, and an impassioned glance at Donna Marianna, who was pale and trembling.

"Yes," said the colonel, "let us put off serious matters till to-morrow; the shock we have suffered has been too rough for us to be fit for any discussion just at present."

"What has happened to you? The pagans have not seized the Mineral de Quitovar? or at least I hope not."

"Yes, they have, cousin; the pueblo has been captured by the red-skins, sacked, and burnt. We had great difficulty in making

our escape, and passed through extraordinary dangers ere we were so lucky as to reach your hacienda."

"That is disastrous news, cousin; I had been told of it, but was unwilling to believe it."

"It is unhappily but too true."

"Well, thank Heaven, cousin, you are in safety here. As for you, Don Rufino, I am happy that you escaped from the horrible massacre; you are not a soldier, you are——"

"An assassin!" a sepulchral voice suddenly exclaimed, and a hand was laid heavily on the senator's shoulder.

The company turned with horror. Strong-hand's companion had let fall the hat and cloak that disguised him, and was standing, stern and menacing, behind the senator.

"Oh!" the latter exclaimed, as he recoiled with terror, "Rodolfo! Don Rodolfo!"

"Brother, do I see you again after so many years?" the Marquis said, joyfully, as he advanced towards the stranger.

"The great sachem," Donna Marianna murmured.

The sachem thrust back with a gesture of sovereign contempt the startled senator, and walked into the centre of the group.

"Yes, it is I, brother; I, the proscribed, the disinherited, who enter the house of my father after an absence of twenty years, in order to save the last representative of my family."

"Oh, brother! brother!" the Marquis exclaimed, sorrowfully.

"Recover yourself, Hernando! I entertain no feelings of hatred or rancour for you; on the contrary, I have always loved you, and though I was far away from you I have never lost you out of sight. Come to my arms, brother; let us forget the past, only to think of the joy of being reunited."

The Marquis threw himself into his brother's arms; Don Ruiz and Donna Marianna imitated him, and for some minutes there was an uninterrupted interchange of embraces among the members of this family, who had so long been separated.

"It was through me that you received the sum which Paredes was to receive at Hermosillo," Don Rodolfo continued; "to

me you also owe the discovery of the gold mine which has saved you. But I have not come here solely to embrace you and yours, brother; I have come to punish a villain! This man," he added, pointing to the senator, who was trembling with rage and terror—"this man was my valet; in order to rob me, he attempted to assassinate me cowardly, treacherously, and behind my back. Such is the man whose dark machinations had succeeded in deceiving you, and to whom you were on the point of giving your daughter: let him contradict me if he dare!"

"Oh!" the senator muttered, with a furious gesture.

"Villain!" the Marquis exclaimed; "help! help! seize the monster!"

Several servants rushed into the room, but before they could reach Don Rufino the latter had bounded with a tiger leap upon Don Rodolfo, and buried a dagger in his chest. The sagem fell back with a cry of pain into the arms of his brother and his son. After the crime was committed, the assassin threw down his weapon, and said

to the startled spectators, with an air of defiance and satisfied hatred,—

“Now you can do whatever you like to me, for I am avenged.”

CHAPTER XIX.

FUNERAL OF A SACHEM.

Two days had elapsed since the atrocious attack made by Don Rufino on Don Rodolfo de Moguer. The Papazos had captured the hacienda without a blow, as the gates were opened to them; for the stupor and terror of the Mexicans at this horrible crime were so great, that they forgot all precautions. But we must do the red-skins the justice of stating that, contrary to their habits, they committed no excesses in the hacienda, either by virtue of superior orders, or in consequence of the sorrow which the wound of their great sachim caused them. Donna Esperanza had arrived with Padre Serapio at the same time as the Indian warriors, and she and Donna Marianna did not leave the wounded man's bed.

Don Hernando was inconsolable, and the colonel could not forgive himself for having supposed for a moment that the senator was an honest man. The whole hacienda was plunged in sorrow, and Don Rodolfo alone watched death approach with a calm brow. Fray Serapio dressed his wound: his night was tolerably quiet, and in the morning the monk entered the wounded man's room. At a sign from Don Rodolfo, his wife and niece, who had watched the whole night through by his bedside, withdrew.

"Now, padre," he said, when they left the room, "it is our turn."

And he helped him to remove the bandages. The monk frowned.

"I am condemned, am I not?" said Don Rodolfo, who attentively followed in the monk's face the feelings that agitated him.

"God can perform a miracle," the Franciscan stammered, in a faint voice.

The sachem smiled softly.

"I understand you," he replied; "answer me, therefore, frankly and sincerely. How many hours have I still to live?"

"What good is that, my dear, good master?" the monk murmured. .

"Padre Serapio," the chief interrupted him, in a firm voice, "I want to know, in order that I may settle my affairs on earth, before I appear in the presence of God."

"Do you insist on my telling you the truth?"

"Pray do so—the entire truth."

The poor man stifled a sigh, and answered, in a voice broken by emotion—

"Unless a miracle occur, you will give back your soul to your Creator at sunset."

"I thank you, my friend," the sachem said, his austere face not displaying the slightest trace of emotion. "Ask my brother to come here, for I have to talk with him. Keep back my wife and niece until I ask for them. Go, father; I will see you again before I die."

The worthy monk withdrew, choked with sobs. The interview of the two brothers was long, for Don Hernando had many faults to ask pardon for at the hands of him whose place he had taken. But Don Rodolfo, far from reproaching him, tried on the contrary to console him, by talking to

him in a cheerful voice, and reminding him of the happy days of their childhood. He also thanked his brother warmly for having freed him from the heavy burden of supporting the family honour, and allowing him to live in accordance with his tastes and humour. Many other things were talked of, after which the Marquis retired, with pale brow and eyes swollen with tears, which he tried in vain to repress, that he might not sadden the last moments of the man whose great soul was revealed to him at this supreme moment—of the brother whom he had so cruelly misunderstood, and who had even sacrificed his life to insure his brother's happiness.

Donna Marianna and Donna Esperanza then returned to the dying man's room, followed by Padre Serapio, and a few moments after the Marquis came back, accompanied by Stronghand. The young man, in spite of his Indian education and affected stoicism, knelt down sobbing by his father's side. For some moments father and son talked together in a low voice: no one save God knew what words were uttered by these two men during the solemn interview.

"Come here, niece," Don Rodolfo at length said, addressing Donna Marianna.

The maiden knelt down sobbing by the hunter's side. The aged man looked for a moment tenderly at their two young faces, pale with sorrow, which were piously leaning over him ; then making an effort to sit up, and supported on one side by his brother, on the other by Donna Esperanza, he said, in a voice that trembled with emotion—

"Niece, answer me as you would answer God ; for the dying, you know, no longer belong to this world. Do you love my son ?"

"Yes, uncle," the maiden answered through her tears—"yes, I love him."

"And you, Diego, my son, do you love your cousin ?"

"Father, I love her," the young man answered, in a voice crushed by emotion.

Don Rodolfo turned to his brother, who understood his glance.

"Bless our children, brother," he said, "according to the wish you expressed to me ; Padre Serapio will unite them in your presence."

The wounded man stretched out his trembling hands over the two young people.

"Children," he said, in a powerful voice, though with an accent of ineffable tenderness, "I bless you: be happy."

And, crushed by the efforts he had been forced to make, he fell back in a half-fainting state on his bed. When he regained consciousness, through the attention of Don Esperanza and his niece, he perceived an altar by the side of his bed. On his expressing a desire that the ceremony should take place at once, Padre Serapio, assisted by José Paredes, who was weeping bitterly, read the marriage mass. After the nuptial benediction, Don Rodolfo received the last sacraments, amid the tears and sobs of all present.

"And now, my friends," he said, "that I have accomplished my duties as a Christian and Spanish gentleman, it is time for me to perform my duties as an Indian chief; so allow the Papazo warriors to enter."

The doors opened, and the warriors entered: they were sad, gloomy, and thoughtful. The sachem had sat up to receive them, supported by his son Stronghand.

The warriors silently surrounded the bed on which their venerated chief lay, among them being Sparrowhawk and Peccari. The sachem looked calmly round the circle, and then spoke in a calm and deeply accentuated voice :—

“ The Master of Life has suddenly recalled me to Him. I did not fall in action, but beneath the dagger of a cowardly assassin. I regret leaving my nation before I had completed the task which I undertook for their happiness. What I had not time to do, another will doubtless terminate. My brothers must continue the war they have so happily and gloriously commenced ; and though I am leaving them, my mind will remain among them. The warriors of my nation must never forget that the Master of Life created them free, and that they must live and die free. The Papazos are brave men, invincible warriors, and slavery is not made for them. On the point of appearing before the Master of Life, I implore the chiefs not to forget that the white persons who surround me form part of my family. If my brothers retain after my death any recollection of the good which I have con-

tinually sought to do them, they will be kind to the pale-faces whom I love. I have only one word more to add: I desire to give back my soul to the Master of Life beneath the buffalo-hide cabin of the warriors of my nation, and in the midst of my nation. I desire also that all the rites customary at the death of the chiefs should be performed for me."

A tremor of joy ran along the ranks of the red-skin warriors on hearing the last words; for they had feared in their hearts that the sachem would wish to be interred after the fashion of the white men. The Peccari then replied, in the name of all—

"My father's wishes are orders for his children; never, so long as the powerful confederation of the Papazos exists, shall an insult be offered to the pale-faces whom he loves. Our father can die in peace; all his wishes will be religiously carried out by his children."

A flash of joy sparkled in the sachem's eye at this promise, which he knew would be strictly kept. The Peccari continued,—

"The Papazo chiefs are sad; their hearts are swollen by the thought of losing their

father ; they fear lest his death may be the cause of great disorder in their confederation, and injure the success of the war which has scarce begun."

"I belong to my sons till the last moment of my existence ; what can I do for them ?"

"My father can do a great deal," the chief answered.

"My ears are open ; I am waiting for my son to explain himself."

"The chiefs," continued Peccari, "and the great braves of the confederation, assembled at sunrise round the council fire : they desire, in order that no discord may spring up among them, that our father, the great sachem, should himself appoint his successor ; for they feel persuaded that our father's choice will fall on a brave and wise chief, worthy to command men."

The sachem reflected for a moment.

"Be it so," he said at length ; "the determination of the sachems is wise, and I approve of it. Sparrowhawk will command in my place when I am called away by the Great Spirit ; no one is more worthy to be the first sachem of the nation."

Sparrowhawk quitted the ranks, stepped forward, and bowed respectfully to the dying man.

"I thank my father," he said, "for the signal honour he has done me; but I am very young to command chiefs and renowned warriors, and I fear that I shall break down in the heavy task imposed on me. My father leaves a son; Stronghand is one of the great braves of our nation, and his wisdom is renowned."

"My son is a pale-face; he does not know the wants of the Papazos so well as Sparrowhawk. Sparrowhawk will command."

"I obey my father, since he insists; but Stronghand will ever be one of the great chiefs of my nation."

A flattering murmur greeted these clever remarks.

"I thank my son Sparrowhawk in the name of Stronghand. Modesty becomes a chief so celebrated as is my son," the sachem continued; "the Great Spirit will inspire him, and he will do great things. I have spoken. Do the chiefs approve my choice?"

"We could not have chosen better,"

Peccari answered. "We sincerely thank our father for having anticipated our dearest wishes by choosing Sparrowhawk."

This scene, so simple in its grandeur, and so truly patriarchal, affected all the spectators, who felt their hearts swollen by sorrow. The sachem continued—

"I feel my strength rapidly leaving me, and life is abandoning me; the Great Spirit will soon call me to Him. My sons will carry me beneath a tent of my nation, in order that I may breathe my last sigh in their midst."

Stronghand, the Marquis, Peccari, and Sparrowhawk gently lifted the wounded man on their shoulders, and carried him to the front yard of the hacienda, followed by all the rest, who walked silently and thoughtfully in the rear. A lodge, formed of stakes covered with buffalo hides, had been prepared to receive the great chief; the bed on which he was lying was softly put down, and the chief's eyes were turned toward the setting sun. Then all the warriors and their squaws, whom messengers had informed of the sachem's wound, and who had hurried to the hacienda, surrounded the tent. The

Mexicans themselves mingled with the crowd, and a deadly silence brooded over the hacienda, in which, however, more than six thousand persons were assembled at this moment.

All eyes were turned toward the dying sachem, by whose side were standing the members of his family, Padre Serapio, and the principal chiefs of the Papazos. Now and then the aged man uttered a few words, which he addressed at times to the monk, at others to his brother, or to the Indian chiefs. When the sun was beginning to sink on the horizon, the wounded man's breathing began to grow panting, his eyes gradually became covered by a mist, and he did not speak; but he tightly grasped his son's and wife's hands in his right hand, and Sparrowhawk's in his left.

All at once a nervous tremor passed over the dying man's body; his cheeks were tinged; his half-closed eyes opened again; he sat up without any extraneous help, and shouted, in a strong, clear voice, which was heard by all—

“I come, Lord! Papazos, farewell! Esperanza! Esperanza! we shall met again!”

His eyes closed ; a livid pallor spread over his face ; his limbs stiffened, and he fell back heavily as he exhaled his last sigh. He was dead. His last thought was for his wife, whom he had so dearly loved. The sobs, hitherto restrained, burst forth suddenly and violently among the crowd.

"Our father is dead !" Sparrowhawk shouted, in a thundering voice.

"Vengeance !" the red-skins yelled.

In fact, the murderer of the chief was still alive. The white men, who did not wish to witness the horrible scene that was about to take place, withdrew ; Stronghand, the colonel, Paredes, and Marianno alone remained. The body of the defunct sachem was at once surrounded by the squaws : they painted it with several bright colours, dressed it in a buffalo robe, formed his hair into a tuft as a sign of his rank, and stretched him out on a daïs. The assassin, who was pale but resolute, was then brought up.

Sparrowhawk placed himself at the head of the corpse, and began a long funeral oration, which was frequently interrupted by the sobs of his audience ; then, pointing

with an expressive gesture to the murderer, who was still standing motionless in the midst of the Indians who guarded him, he said—

“Commence the punishment.”

We will not describe the frightful punishment which was inflicted on the senator; such horrible details are repulsive to our pen. We will restrict ourselves to stating that he was flayed alive, and that all his joints were cut in succession. He suffered indescribable agony for three long hours ere he died. Night had set in during this interval. When the wretched assassin was dead, chosen warriors took their chief's body on their shoulders, and proceeded by the light of torches to the huerta, at the spot where the hacienda hung over the precipice. On reaching this spot the chief's magnificent steed was brought up. On his back his master's corpse was securely tied with deer-skin thongs, holding his totem in one hand and his gun in the other; the scalps of his foes were fastened to his saddle-bow, and on his neck and arms were his bead necklaces and copper ornaments. Then, amid the sobs of the squaws, the horse was

led to the plateau, where the Papago warriors, mounted and dressed in their war-paint, formed a semicircle, whose ends reached the precipice.

Then took place a scene whose savage grandeur could only be compared to the funeral rites performed at the death of the barbarous chiefs during those great national migrations which produced the overthrow of the Roman Empire. By the glare of the torches—whose flames, agitated by the wind, imparted a fantastic aspect to the gloomy and stern landscape in this part of the huerta—the horse was placed in the midst of the semicircle, and the horsemen, brandishing their weapons, struck up their war-song with a savage energy. The startled horse bounded on to the plateau, bearing the corpse, to which each of its bounds imparted such an oscillating movement that the rider appeared to be restored to life. On reaching the brink of the precipice the horse recoiled with terror, with flaming nostrils; then, suddenly turning round, it tried to burst the living rampart, which was constantly contracted behind it. Several times the animal renewed the same

exertions; but at last, attacked by a paroxysm of terror, pursued by the yells of the Indians, and wounded by their long lances, it rose on its hind legs, uttered a terrible snort, and leaped into the gulf with its burden. At the same moment all the torches were extinguished, the tumult was followed by a mournful silence, and the warriors retired.

On the morrow, at sunrise, the red-skins left the hacienda, to which they did not once return during the whole of the war, which lasted three years. We may possibly some day tell what was the termination of this grand uprising of the Indians, who on several occasions all but deprived the Mexican republic of its finest and richest provinces.

THE END.





